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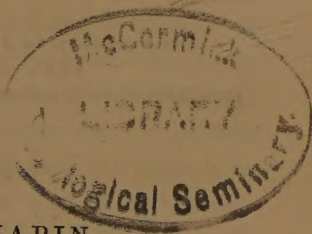
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PREFACE.

THE present volume is submitted to the public as a companion to preceding works, such as "Hours of Communion," and "The Crown of Thorns." I presume upon no merit in them beyond that of discourses preached in the ordinary ministrations of the pulpit; but I have the same desire in publishing that I had in preaching them, — a desire to do what I can in extending the spirit of Christ's religion among men. To accomplish this, I know no other method than a reiteration of the truth, however old and simple.

I wish here to express my sense of the favor with which other works of mine have been received, and my special gratification in knowing that they have passed beyond denominational lines, and struck the common chord of Christian sympathy. This is the result of no intentional compromise of what I deem the truth. But, while I would never turn out of

the way to avoid the expression of what I believe, I would never drag in my peculiarities where they are not spontaneous. I am willing the sentiments I utter should pass by their intrinsic superscription, and shall take no pains to affix a sectarian label. And I rejoice that the field of practical religion is the very centre of the church universal, where we may exchange unspoken salutations with the seekers and with the good of every name, and hear the murmuring of those Beatitudes which flow deeper than our dogmas, and refresh *all* who really love the Master.

E. H. C.

NEW YORK, MAY, 1853.

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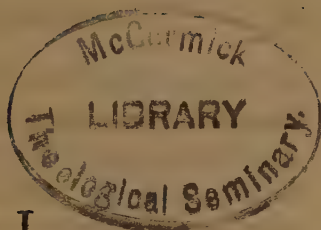
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I.

THE BLESSING OF THE POOR IN SPIRIT.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. — MATTHEW 5 : 3.

THE characteristic which more immediately strikes us, in studying the Beatitudes, is the difference between their *estimates* and those which are current in the opinions and feelings of the world. This contrast, we all know, was peculiarly distinct when they were first pronounced. The minds and the hearts of that multitude which listened to the sermon on the mount were stirred by a brooding expectancy, a splendid hope. They had witnessed the great moral movements of the day,—the career of John and the wonders of Jesus; and that idea,

to which they were so sensitive — the idea of the Messiah — needed but a single word to burst into a flame. Upon those eager ears, those souls throbbing with intense Jewish conceptions, how strangely, then, must have smote these opening words of the Saviour's discourse; not merely letting them in to a new system of religion, but to a new life, a new world!

And yet, how much better comprehended, or heeded, are these words now than they were then? Suppose some divine teacher were to come among us. Suppose he should enter the great arena of traffic and exchange, where Mammon sits upon his glittering throne, and men sweat and jostle for gain,—suppose he should enter there, and exclaim, “Blessed are the poor in spirit!” Or, let him go into the chambers of luxurious pleasure, where life flows out in frivolity, sparkling as it runs, and, referring to deeper and neglected springs of our nature, let him say, “Blessed are they that mourn!” Or, again, let him glide amidst the cunning machinery of statesmanship, or over those more awful

fields where ambition plants its schemes in blood and builds with human bones its pyramid of power,—and there let him utter that profound truth, “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth!” Let him pronounce any of these declarations, which break with sharp contrast against the paramount ideals of the world, and, though they might obtain a reverent hearing, they would hardly check these wheels within wheels, or pass in among them as a living spirit to direct their movements, or to glorify their aspects. They would be dismissed, rather, as statements of paradox, or the sublime utterances of mysticism. Eighteen hundred years still develop the fact that the estimates of the world differ from the estimates of the gospel, the fact that Jesus answers in a strange and peculiar way the question which our nature, in its highest and lowest condition,—often with an outcry of agony,—asks, “Where is happiness?”—“What is the true good?”

As another remark, applying generally to this series of Beatitudes, let me say that they do not

challenge the legitimacy of other virtues, only they exalt to their proper rank those qualities which men are apt to overlook or depreciate. Everybody recognizes the majesty of justice, the excellence of firmness, the glory of brave and energetic performance. But it is more easy to underrate, not the intrinsic beauty, perhaps, but the intrinsic might, of poverty of spirit, of meekness, and mercy. And it is a proof of the authority of Christianity, of the profound harmony of the teachings of Jesus with the essential truth of things, that in these milder qualities he predicates the noblest elements of character, the seeds of the rarest greatness and of illimitable power.

One thing more. These declarations were specially applicable to the immediate disciples of Christ. In some respects, sharper lines of distinction existed between them and the rest of mankind than are apparent now. They could more literally be classed as the poor, the persecuted and the sorrowful, than at present; and the promised blessings were more exactly bal-

anced against their actual condition. Yet, in their essence, in their spiritual significance, we shall find them adapted to all times and conditions. This significance, to some extent, it is now my purpose to consider.

Concerning the particular Beatitude which comes before us at this time, I remark, in the first place, that there is some question as to *who* are indicated by the term "poor in spirit." Some suppose that the literally poor are meant. To this class especially Christianity was preached, — they were peculiarly attracted by it; and, in the gospel of Luke, the passage reads, without any qualification, "Blessed be ye *poor*." Nor need we hesitate to adopt this interpretation, if we admit, at the same time, a *moral* quality. It cannot be supposed that Christianity attaches any virtue to mere poverty, without regard to the use which is made of that condition, or the spirit in which it is maintained. And when we consider the fact to which I alluded just now, that these Beatitudes were especially fitted to the case of Christ's immediate disciples, the moral

quality appears; for, in this instance, poverty of spirit and poverty of earthly means were identical. Those who had the humility and the teachableness to gather around Jesus were likewise those who possessed but little of this world's goods; and many of them, like their master, perhaps, had not where to lay their heads. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the poor everywhere, and in all time, without any moral distinction, but for the bare reason that they *are* poor." But he turned to his own hearers, and said, "Blessed be *ye* poor."

And yet it cannot be denied that, in this destitution of earthly means, there is a favorable soil for the growth of the virtue and the fulfillment of the blessing. A soil not always cultivated; sometimes barren or covered over with pollution. There are instances where poverty and its attendant circumstances drive the humanity out of a man, or, rather, crush it, so that it cannot expand; drowning his better nature in the appetites, or tormenting him with the sting of bodily necessity, until he becomes as a

brute,—and yet, not entirely killing that humanity, for nothing can. Enough is left to make the sad and awful revelation that it is *not* a brute nature. Sometimes it is aroused to that condition in which there is sensitiveness without discrimination,—in which it feels its restraints, but does not recognize its helps; and even the highest sanctities of life are apprehended on their reverse side,—the awful darkness, but not the embosoming light; the thunders that cleave the rocks of Sinai, not the majestic mercy-tones in which they melt away. No aspect of humanity is so terrible as swinish indifference or numb distress, alternating with insane resistance and savage scepticism. This sensual, godless poverty is worse, even, than gilded irreligion,—worse, at least, in appearance—more ghastly and sickening. And it is a kind of poverty which we need not go out of Christian lands to find. In this very city it swelters, close around you, a deep, dark pool throwing up the sediment of blasphemy and of crime, upon which this Sabbath's light has cast no holy brightness, over

which these Sabbath bells have rolled no welcome tone.

And, while such are the fruits which sometimes grow up with poverty and in poverty, there are yet others, more advanced, more enlightened, for whom it achieves no moral discipline, or works only a sullen hardness and bitterness. But where the affections are in a right posture, and the moral vision is clear, the lack of outward means giving freedom from spiritual encumbrances, and lessening the ties that bind us to the earth, constraining the soul to search for other resources, and to look up for a higher good, is peculiarly favorable to the state of mind designated in the text. It is easy to see how these influences operated upon those who gathered around Jesus. There was little or nothing for them to sacrifice in becoming his disciples; at least, there were no impediments of pride, no luxurious indulgences, no barriers of sensual ease, through which his truth had to force its way; while that religion whose spirit he breathed into their souls opened unsuspected treasures of

enjoyment, lifted them above their material necessities, and enriched them with the treasures of faith and of hope. And thus is it now. If the poor man's earthly lot is hard, it makes more welcome the suggestions of heaven. The strictures of necessity, the sharp mockeries of disappointment, fill him with a sense of dependence, and put his soul in a position to wait upon God. He has his peculiar temptations; yet, so long as they do not pin him down and imprison him, they do not cause him to become fascinated with the world. His upward escape from it is easier than for the rich man. Eternal splendors stream clearer through the rents in his earthly fortune, and divine visitants have a readier access to him. His wealthy brother is shut in with comfort, and forms of luxurious obeisance stand around his bed. But what though *his* couch be the bare earth, and his canopy the sky? The more immediately is he enfolded by the sanctities that environ our mortal lot. His stony pillow may become, like Jacob's, the foot of a celestial ladder — the landing-place of angels.

We discover, then, the significance of this Beatitude, even when applied to the literally poor, in the case of those to whom it was originally addressed, and in the usual tendencies of this condition at all times. The poor, far more than the rich, did become the disciples of Jesus; and the poor, on the whole, are more likely than the rich to become so. In the gospel, there is no special antagonism to wealth in itself, there is nothing that encourages hatred or jealousy of wealthy men. There is a spirit in it which must yet greatly modify our social relations, and push into startling prominence this great question of rich and poor, of poverty and destitution. But it furnishes no fuel for the anarchist. It guards the foundations of social stability, it renders due honor to industry, and permits us to recognize well-earned wealth as a symbol of dignity and power. Nay, in the condition of those who are successful in life, it indicates the opportunity of a profounder discipline than is afforded by poverty. In the case of the young man who went away sorrowful

because he had great possessions, the Saviour does not say that it is impossible for the wealthy to gain eternal life, but "How *hardly* shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven;" thereby indicating not only the reluctance of such, but a great moral occasion; for, in proportion to the difficulty of the endeavor is the glory of the achievement. And it is so. The rich man who complies with the terms of discipleship is a stronger man than he who glides into them almost by the sheer pressure of poverty.

But the fact that, while poverty of spirit is thus naturally joined with destitution of earthly means, it is not confined to this condition, leads us to look for a more comprehensive meaning in this Beatitude than that which limits it to the literally poor. It should be considered as referring not so much to outward circumstances as to an inward state, a spiritual characteristic, which may have close affinities with worldly poverty, but often accompanies large possessions.

Blessed, then, not those who are merely poor,

but the poor in *spirit* — this is the essential declaration of the text. But let us not confound the poor in spirit with the *poor-spirited*. Christianity has no alliance with any such meagre and decrepit quality. It has no alliance with cowardice, or watery sentimentalism. It lies at the roots of all genuine manliness, and the results of its development are before the world. It has furnished the grandest examples of strength of purpose and practical power. It has been the animating impulse in the lives of the truly great, and has rolled through the veins of heroes.

But by “the poor in spirit” I understand those who are conscious of their spiritual wants, their short-comings and dependence,— the humble, the trustful, the lowly in soul. I understand those who mourn not because of outward, but inward necessities, and, in the consciousness of their condition, keep near the divine source of help and guidance. It is a spirit opposed to self-righteousness and self-will, to boastfulness, pride and presumption.

And this is really the ground of all true ad-

vancement and exaltation, of all genuine excellence and power. Self-conceit and haughtiness, or fulness of soul, are barriers to progress; they are, generally, the landmarks of a shallow attainment. The true man never surfeits upon his attainments, but probes his deficiencies and summons his ideals. The actual hero stoops to conquer. The sincere seeker for wisdom gets low that he may find. The scholar is more encumbered by the consciousness of what he lacks than by the wealth of his acquisitions; and the saint is so busy with what is yet required, that he has little time to count what has been achieved. And so these are driven forward to larger conquests. In this way the soul, forgetting what is behind, pressing forward to that which is before, sweeps vast tracts of knowledge and of power. In this way the poor in spirit possess the kingdom of heaven. For the teachable nature shall surely be taught, and those who with an earnest humility knock at the gates of holiness and love shall see them opened, and shall enter.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Whether it be an inward joy or an outward heritage, whether found this side the grave or beyond, it is theirs,— theirs in the results of sacred effort, theirs in the fruit of spiritual discipline, theirs in the more essential communion with God and immortality, to which, in their very lowliness of spirit, walking steadfastly through the temptations of life, walking confidently through the shadow of death, they have risen.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” My friends, this was a mighty truth for those disciples, upon whose upturned faces fell the lights and shadows of the mountain, as they listened to the words of One who spoke as never man spoke. They were meagrely possessed of this world’s goods; they wore no honors; they held no rank or consideration among men. But they had gone apart there from the tumult of the world; they had gone apart from its eager strivings, its solitudes and its ambition, with a sense of moral hunger,

a craving for something that earth could not satisfy, but which the teachings of the Saviour filled. And in this inward rest and consolation there was a gift which exceeded in value all the riches of the world, and which should remain, pregnant with blessing and with power, when all its kingdoms had vanished away. Theirs was the inheritance of deathless affections, of spiritual stability and glory, and of serene assurance in God. O ! what was Rome, what was Jerusalem, compared with that domain of spiritual consciousness which flowed out beyond the land and the sea, and comprehended all that is real and good in the universe, all that endures when time shall be no more ! Think what that blessing was which should be shared by the most obscure of Christ's lowly, faithful hearers ; and consider the greatness of the declaration in the text, as it thrilled upon their ears and their hearts.

But this declaration is equally grand and important for us. Perhaps many of us can say that we are satisfied, that we have no great anx-

iety of soul, and are at peace. But upon *what* are we resting? Is our security in our property, our social position, our good health and flow of spirits? O! how unstable is the ground of our reliance, how liable to be swept away by the stroke of a moment! And where is all our peace then, — then where are we? Or are we not at rest, but stirred by a vague craving, a quenchless desire we know not for what? Does not wealth satisfy us, nor pleasure give us true joy? Are we uneasy in the serenest hour of prosperity, and, in every condition, conscious of

“ An aching void

This world can never fill ” ?

Do we know that the dearest ties of our present state are mortgaged to death, and that we need an anchor for the soul when storms awake and the wild waves dash? If so, let us, like the disciples of old, who gathered around the great Teacher, listen with a lowly, trusting disposition to Him who spoke as never man spoke. Let us turn from our vain endeavors to obtain perfect

happiness in any possession of this world, and open our hearts to the blessedness that he promises to bestow. They who have thus turned have never been disappointed. From all the experiences of life they have come, and found the rest they could get nowhere else. From the circles of splendid revelry, from the chase after fame, from the pressure of life's calamities and the perplexity of its changes, from the strife of senates and the exaltation of thrones, they have come, and their humble faith has opened for them a spring of universal bliss, and lifted them above all the chances and all the evils of the world. Throwing by their sensual indifference, and their pride, and their false philosophy, in trustfulness and lowliness and earnest desire, they have been caught up into a kingdom that is *not* of this world, and which alone is completely fitted to the need and the aspirations of an immortal nature.

Yes, ye who have sought happiness in all the methods of this world, there is still one method which is above the world,— which promises rest,

and never-ending progress, and enduring possession. To obtain this, it is required that you should become conscious of your need, and trustful in the help that is proffered you. Cast off the garments of frivolity, put away the reluctance of a hard worldliness and a proud self-will, come as little children to the Master's feet. Poor man, thine shall be a domain so wide, so full of wealth, that your poverty will become glorified, and your wretched estate as a celestial throne, and yours shall be the kingdom of heaven. O ! rich man, thine shall be that secure possession which rises above all the mutation of houses and lands ; a treasure that suffers no canker and no loss ; a good that remains when death's cold hand shall strike every material thing from your grasp,—for, if thine is this loyal and lowly spirit, thine is the kingdom of heaven.

II.

THE BLESSING OF THE MOURNERS.

Blessed are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted.—

MATTHEW 5 : 4.

I HAVE already observed that these declarations of Jesus were specially fitted to his immediate disciples. Those who thus early embraced his cause were, in a particular sense, *mourners*. They were called upon to encounter sharp afflictions, to part with earthly goods, to sever the dearest ties, to confront death. Moreover, those who professed faith in the gospel, generally speaking, were not those at ease among the luxuries of this life,—the caressed and the successful,—but those who were familiar with the roughness and the bitterness of the world. These

were in a more favorable position to hear those words of wondrous power that fell from the lips of Jesus, and that entered the weary heart with illimitable suggestion and enduring peace.

But the terms of this Beatitude are not so literally connected with discipleship now as then. At least, the text does not imply that all gladness is irreligious or unreligious, or that the true view and practice of life is a gloomy one. Gladness and joy are spoken of, elsewhere, in a way that contradicts this conception; and the precept is, "Rejoice evermore." Even in the instance before us, mourning is not referred to as a permanent or a peculiarly sacred condition, but as a transition state. It is not said "Blessed are they that mourn, because they *mourn*," but because they shall be *comforted*. Mourning is consecrated, as leading to higher and profounder joy. And in the general spirit of true religion we find no encouragement for fixed melancholy or asceticism, but a disposition which throws over life and the universe a tempered yet serene and cheering light.

But, while the text was peculiarly adapted to those early disciples,—while they, especially, were the mourning, and should be comforted, not only in the course of events and in the future life, but in the intrinsic nature of that religion which they had taken into their souls,—still, it declares a general truth, which, at least in this lower world, it is probable will always have its application.

And I observe, in the first place, that the words under consideration declare a great law of human life and experience. If we take the text apart from its precise meaning in this place, and interpret it generally, I may say that, in the ordinary course of things, it has a two-fold illustration. It is true, as a rule, that they who mourn are comforted. As it is ordained, in the arrangements of a beneficent Providence, that no pain shall be without its relief, so there is no sorrow without its mitigation. They may be so intense, indeed, that the body or the mind shall break down under them; but I speak of conscious and permanent suffering. And I say, if there is

a case of this kind, fixed and without relief, it is rare—it is an exception. In the onset of the calamity all may be dark. The incident smites all the senses, and the entire man is paralyzed. But, gradually, light tinges the gloom,—some spring of consolation wells up in the bosom of grief. Time exerts its healing processes, new interests open, or the purified vision discerns uses and blessings where at first it saw nothing but disappointment and woe. In some way the wounded spirit is stayed, so that it is not left utterly disconsolate, so that it is enabled to endure and to move onward. Life, in fact, is a series of alternations. It flows more or less equably, in ripples or in waves; but there are interruptions to its sorrows, as well as its joys. If, at any time, ours is full and complete happiness, do we not hold it tremulously, with a wise fear, in the very intensity of the enjoyment foreboding change, as in the perfectly clear sky we argue the storm? So, athwart the present trouble there lies some interval of peace and hope; and often does it prove true that, though

“weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.”

But another illustration of the declaration in the text, considered as a law of human life, is unfolded in the fact that some of the best elements of character, the richest fruits of experience, are born in adversity; and, in this sense, they who mourn, who pass through the discipline of disappointment and affliction, are blessed. Let any one, taking up the sum-total of his life, consider what instances have been the most profitable to him, in which he has gathered into his soul the most strength and wisdom,—and, as a general thing, I think he will find that these did not occur in what he called his “brightest moments;” not in the full sweep of prosperity; but, if he has accumulated any profound experience, it has been in disappointment and failure, in defeated plans and in mortifications, in the low valley of humiliation, and at times under the shadow of death. In this light, the existence of sorrow and suffering appears beautifully consistent. Those events which, at the time of their

occurrence, seemed only dark and incongruous, when we gather up the elements of our life into unity, when we study it as a whole, tested by a spiritual purpose, are seen to have contributed the most solid results to moral achievement and to character. And perhaps these adverse events are thus efficient because they *are* interruptions, and not continuous experiences. A life of unvarying sadness and calamity would, probably, prove as unprofitable as a life of perpetual hilarity and success. It is quite likely that we shall find as little religious sensitiveness among those whose lives are entirely hemmed round by adversity, as with those who are surrounded by riches and honors, and whose existence is a constant flow of ease. Such appears to have been Agur's thought, when he prayed to be kept from either extreme. If, on the one hand, men are blinded by the good of this life, on the other they are so crushed by material necessities that they cannot rise into a spiritual atmosphere. Their entire activity is excited by the call of daily wants, or they glide on in sluggish indifference,

plastic to circumstances, sullen under the sullen sky that lowers over them, all their better nature overshadowed and paralyzed by their lot.

At least, my friends, we know there is efficacy in disappointment or adversity, when it occurs as a foil to our plans; when it breaks in upon the tenor of our days as a counter experience; when it darkens the summer sky of life with the suggestion of higher and profounder realities; when the soul is loosened from its fancied security in earthly good, and sent in search of substantial rest; and the glittering forms of things that seemed so compact and solid at the going down of the sun, as they stand up in relief amidst the infinite spaces of being and the night-like glories of eternity, fade and look empty. And it is in trial, it is in poverty, pain and persecution, that the strength of the human spirit is tested, and its energies summoned forth, as all our physical power is challenged when thrown among the crests and hollows of the sea, and one strikes out with a bold vigor when thus overwhelmed who before could not swim a stroke.

Often a great sorrow, rushing over the soul like a freshet, has swept away its upper-soil, and laid bare unsuspected treasures. Thus has adversity stung the sluggish man to enterprise. Thus has obloquy roused the timid to courage. Thus has the uncouth nature grown beautiful with sympathy and fidelity. Thus has woman risen from her drooping reliance to a heroic strength, and covered her breast with a mailed fortitude. The brilliant beauty, that only kindled passion, has been transcended by a loveliness shining out from her deeper nature in lineaments of patience, fidelity and affection. That which flickered only as a coquettish light in the saloon and the boudoir steadies itself into a pure and holy flame — a taper for the sick-bed vigil, a lamp for the dungeon's gloom.

So in sorrow and in suffering are hidden the springs of a peace and a power that can be affected by no outward storms. It is a great thing, when one has grown strong through that trial which melts away the dross and proves the true gold; when, being driven to the handling of many

expedients, he has been trained to detect all counterfeit comforts, and to discriminate between unsubstantial good and that which abides every test; when he has learned to dispense with all outward props, can let riches, honors, health, drop away from him, and yet feel that all this does not touch his real life; while above these coils of uncertainty and mutation he lifts his naked personality erect in its own spiritual resources. Surely, prosperity has never generated such depths of power, such intrinsic and full consolation. And, as to what is termed a life of pleasure, a life of mere frivolity, everybody sees that it is destitute of dignity and force; it has accumulated no treasures of experience, it has no root in reality, it is unprepared for change of fortune, and is discordant with the general tone of things. No; rather, blessed are they that mourn,—who, by the breaking up of some ease, have sunk into profounder depths of wisdom,—who, by the cost of sacrifice, have gained a richer good; for thus comes all real knowledge, all genuine power, whether of the intellect or of the

heart — the scholar's vigil, the philanthropist's self-surrender, or the saint's obedience. Thus out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; thus the most massive characters are seamed with scars; thus have martyrs put on their coronation-robes glittering with fire; thus, through their tears, have the sorrowful first seen the gates of heaven. And in this inward joy, this fulness of peace born of storms, they have been comforted.

But, while thus the text really declares a great general law, our Lord had a more specific meaning in these words, not only in reference to his immediate disciples, but to all who act from the spirit and who cherish the truths of his religion. With this qualification, we need not be precise in determining whether by those that "mourn" he meant, as some say, those who mourn on account of their *afflictions*, or those who mourn on account of their *sins*. We may believe that the Beatitude extends to both these conditions. In the first place, as I remarked in regard to poverty in the preceding discourse, it is evident that the blessing presupposes some

moral quality. There are different kinds of mourning. Some men lament the failure of guilty schemes, or are afflicted not with a penitent and healing, but with an ungodly sorrow; experiencing calamities that ensue from their own follies and vices. Some mourn in a chafed and irritated spirit. There is a great deal of sorrow in the world which is not like Mary's grief for Lazarus, nor like the penitent woman's tears, but which is an unholy and unblessed sorrow, rising from marts, and fields, and inner chambers, like weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is the mourning of incapacitated sensuality and wild passion; it is the mourning of the gray-headed voluptuary, of the miser over his vanished gold, of ambition upon its island-rock looking back over bloody battle-fields and blasted schemes; of thousands in the common ways of life, who sorrow for their loss without regard to its moral relations, and who know not where to look for help. There are many who mourn not in a way which is calculated to make them better, but who, in their bitterness, and

murmuring, and utter despair, are, rather, made worse.

It is evident, then, that the specific application of the Beatitude is not to this kind of mourning, but, I repeat, to those who mourn in the spirit, and in reference to the truths of the gospel. And let me say, in the first place, that it applies to those who mourn on account of their *sins*, who feel their moral delinquency, and who, with penitent regret, strive for amendment. And, my friends, it is a sad thing if there are any of us who never have thus mourned. For it indicates but a vague and superficial conception of our own inner wants and real welfare. It shows either unconsciousness or indifference respecting our relations to God. These experiences would soon bring us to the fact of our sinfulness, of our spiritual weakness and deceit,—of the great chasm between our conceptions and our attainments, our obligations and our performances. Who can look within, and lay open the depths of his own spirit, and not find that which should cause him to mourn,—the perverted capacities,

the unused powers, the violated ideals, the specious motives, the enthroned passions? Who can stop these wheels of worldly action, in whose constant click and jar reflection and remonstrance are drowned, and not hear the still, small voice of conscience? And who, looking away from himself, can consider the character and the dealings of his God,—the unfailing love that has spread round about him continually, the bounty that has attended upon his waywardness, the long-suffering that has borne with his repeated guilt, the tender, pleading, unspeakable mercy that from the face of the Crucified beams upon him in all his sins,—who, that has any moral sensitiveness, any pulse of his manhood left, can do this, and not mourn?

Blessed are those who *do* mourn in this way, and who mourn not merely with regret, but endeavor; for they shall be comforted. And I observe, in the first place, that there is promise in this very sense of deficiency and of guilt. It is the initial step of deliverance, and progress, and peace. There is no greater bar to gain and

advancement than self-conceit—ignorance of our real need. There is but a slight difference between the man who may be said to know nothing and him who thinks he knows everything. For, in either case, we may predict that there will be no attainment of any kind of knowledge, until upon the soul bursts the light of *self-knowledge*, until the ignorant man feels that he *is* ignorant, and the self-conceited awakes to the consciousness of how little he knows of the infinite realm of truth that stretches around him,—into what a shallow segment of it he has penetrated. This simple act of self-knowledge is full of hope, is the postulate of incalculable gain. And so is it with moral and spiritual things. A sense of deficiency, and failure, and transgression, is the spring of blessed results; a spring which, if diligently pressed upon, will open to those results. The difference may be said to be almost infinite between the man who awakes to a consciousness of his sins and of his moral state, and him who is not awake. This consciousness itself, I repeat, is pregnant with blessedness.

But, more than this, those who are sincere in their sorrow will *act* upon its suggestion; and for them there is the blessing of pardon, of reconciliation, of moral victory, of eternal life. They shall be comforted. They have failed, and come short. They have done wrong. But to them is given the glorious assurance that they need not lie down in the gloom of despondency, and under the shadow of their sin. Coming to themselves, leaving the husks and the swine, they need not be even as hired servants, but shall find a Father's arms open to receive them. But there must be effort, as well as regret. The prodigal must rise, and stand on his feet, and *go* to his Father's house. Mere sorrow for sin is no better—is in one sense worse—than moral lethargy. For, if we fail to act now, we act against a stronger consciousness of our guilt. Our eyes have been purified by our tears, so that we have seen clearly our spiritual destitution and our highest good; and it is worse to stop content with the mere emotion of repentance than not to come to ourselves

at all. Our guilt, and our consciousness of guilt, are increased. Sorrow is only the preliminary of repentance,—it is only transitional; the end is, to be delivered from sorrow as the concomitant of sin; the end is, to leap forward to faith and duty, and to be comforted.

But the Beatitude is also for those who mourn, in the spirit and faith of the gospel, on account of their *afflictions*. “They shall be comforted!” How beautifully has this promise been fulfilled, wherever that gospel has shed its light into the heart; wherever the tearful eye has been induced to look up from its desolation, from its ruined hopes, from the pale faces of its dead, to the revelation of the Infinite Father, and to the open sepulchre of Jesus! How many in the great number of the sorrowful have experienced the truth of the Saviour’s words, have been carried with superior strength over the rough ways of the world, have endured the sternest separations, and have walked triumphantly through the shadow of death! If the gospel does not explain all the mysteries of life, and solve the great

enigma of evil, the irresistible proof of its authenticity, that which answers all questions and silences all cavils, is its efficacy in enabling us to bear our trials, to overcome them, to convert them into crowns of joy and springs of consolation.

And this it accomplishes, not by killing the nerves of our humanity, but by lifting our affections to a higher plane, and revealing grander relations; not by turning us away entirely from the interests of this life, but by enabling us to see them in a new light, and to work through them to better ends. With such a faith as this, then, "Blessed are they that mourn." And who does not mourn? Who goes through life without the shadow of sorrow and the stroke of bereavement? Who does not hold in the eye of memory and affection some green and silent mound? Who has not friends at rest in the populous city of the dead? Who does not need the blessing of the text?

Who, at least, is not disquieted by some care, some want, some burden of doubt or fear? My

friends, do we mourn because of affliction? Do we mourn because of sin? Remember, the benediction in the text is for those whose sorrow is of *effort* and of *faith*. Effort as to the evils we can help; faith as to those we cannot help. And, with this effort and this faith, let us be thankful for the words of promise that break through the shadows and uncertainties of the world, through its moral conflicts and over its thick graves,—“Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.”

III.

THE BLESSING OF THE MEEK.

Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.—

MATTHEW 5 : 5.

THE quality here indicated is frequently and specially commended, both in the Old and the New Testament. In the thirty-seventh Psalm the very same declaration is made,—“The meek shall inherit the earth.” The Apostle pronounces it one of the “fruits of the Spirit;” and the Saviour mentions it as one of his own peculiar attributes. “Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

It is difficult to select any single word which will give a precise definition of the term translated "meek" or "meekness." I would say, however, that it is far removed from anything like a feeble or cowardly disposition. On the contrary, it has been the characteristic and the ornament of the most heroic souls that have ever acted upon the stage of history. Such examples as Jesus and Paul, moreover, will show us that it is perfectly consistent with self-respect and a prompt assertion of individual rights. Indeed, without the coëxistence of these high elements, and this general nobleness of nature, it ceases to be a virtue. The mean-spiritedness of the craven, the slovenly abasement of the ignorant, the flaccidity of the temporizing and sluggish nature, is not meekness. But it is the forbearance of conscious power, it is the humility of greatness; it sparkles like a gem in the crown of intellect; it beams like a star on the true hero's breast. It is that flexible and lustrous quality, which inter-fuses and which clothes like a garment all the faculties and graces of a sainted excellence. It

is the spirit of conciliation, and forgiveness, and endurance — the opposite of anger, vindictiveness, and impatience. In fine, I may say that it is not simply one virtue, but the root and essence of many virtues. It is especially the temper of the Christian religion, and of its great Founder.

Now, it is a most superficial notion to consider this class of virtues as soft and feeble. For they are fruits and indications of the profoundest power, the loftiest and richest developments of our nature. It is true that men are too apt to honor as the strongest and most glorious traits those which flourish in the lower spheres of our humanity,—bloody courage, daring violence, and stringent retaliation,—qualities which we share with the brute, and which predominate in the character of the barbarian. The elements of our boasted culture and civilization are yet, in a large degree, mixed with an animal fierceness and a gross materialism. We admire a gladiatorial rather than a moral heroism; we consecrate revenge; we honor the general; we are

fascinated by physical force, the outside show and noise and pomp of greatness. Our ideals of power differ only a little in costume from the gewgaws and the war-paint of the savage ; while around our votive shrines we hang the trophies of a violence which is fitly emblemed by the crimson and dripping jaws of the tiger and the wolf. At the bottom of a good deal of the bravery that appears in the world, too, there lurks a miserable cowardice. Men will face powder and steel, because they cannot face public opinion ; and dare not maintain the true dignity of their nature, because a false and conventional honor calls for blood. Often, those who are termed the strongest men, and men of spirit, are cravens in conscience, the fools of custom, the bond-slaves of the world, who know not how to meet an insult except by an injury, and who strive to overcome evil *with* evil.

Now, Christianity presents us with a conception of power and of human achievement altogether different from this, and possessing a profounder reality. That is not a strong nature which is

borne down from without, and which cannot command its own passions. It is easier to be angry than to hold our temper. Vindictiveness is but a spiteful weakness; and physical courage, often, is nothing more than blind instinct, or muscular hardihood. It requires more might for endurance than for action; for forgiveness than for revenge; for contentment than for fretful complaint or giddy enterprise. These are the products of a strenuous discipline, of an inspiration which flows through the highest inlets of our being. The truest power and greatness is spiritual,—is manifest in the nature that rises superior to all physical force; that subdues it by patience, love and faith; that is brave enough to pardon an offence, rich enough to render good for evil; that has chastened all its passions; that has dismissed its vanity, and rebuked its pride, and called in its ambition; a nature in which there are no clashing impulses, no lawless explosions, but where every true energy combines, beating harmoniously together in the compact symmetry of a righteous soul. The

mightiest agents in the natural world are the stillest and most enduring. Not the swift currents of electric force, but the law of gravity, which binds them about and holds them to its centre. Not the tempest and the torrent, but the immovable mountains, against which the clouds dash and break away, and upon whose brow the sunshine sleeps. It is so in art. By the instinct of genius, the best ideals of majesty and strength are represented, not in the gladiator, or the writhing Laocoon, but in the martyr, calm under his coronet of fire, and in the tearful face of resignation brightening into joy. And it is so with the types of human character. The highest appears not in the desolator, but the Redeemer; not in the king or warrior, but the Christ upon the cross; highest, not merely in personal dignity, but in intrinsic might and majesty—the might and majesty of the meekest compared with that of the proudest and the fiercest.

And so it is in common life. The men of real strength and greatness are not the arro-

gant holders of purse and authority, the vociferous demagogues, the champions of physical power, or the conquerors decorated with blood and feathers, but the patient, the contented, the forgiving, the meek. For the quality specified in the text is not an attribute of weakness, but of true energy; it is an expression of our nature, not in its gross and undisciplined, but in its most refined condition; and shows that man is not merely allied with the bruté, but with the divine. And to him who is thus humble and trustful,—who, in the grandest sweep of reason and the loftiest attainment, yet walks lowly with his God,—to him who is thus long-suffering in injury and patient under all the arrows of affliction, and in asserting his own rights tramples not upon others,—to him who cherishes all these gentle yet strenuous qualities, the blessing is promised.

“He shall inherit the earth.” At first sight, this seems a strange declaration. For it may be said, “Such, of all others, do *not* inherit the earth.” And if we mean those possessions

which the tempter showed the Saviour from the top of the mountain, this assertion cannot be contradicted. For, though it might be shown how, in many instances, this quality conduces to a literal fulfilment of the promise, it must be said that the actual possession of the earth — of its crowns, and honors, and wealth, its broad territories and rich empires — has fallen to the unscrupulous and the violent. The green earth, which the great Father spread out for all his children, over whose hills, and valleys, and forests, and sounding seas, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” — the crimson waves of conquest have rolled over it, it is broken by mounds of battle, and strewn with the wreck of thrones. It has been the foot-stool of tyrants, the spoil of ambition, the purchase of blood, and the task-field of slaves. Nor even yet can it be called the possession of the meek, nor their peculiar object. Still it is the prey of the scheming and the powerful, the heritage of might rather than of right. To the skirts of its civilization cling

injustice and oppression ; around its walls of ease rises the murmur of unrequited toil ; amidst its splendors stalks the train of destitution ; while ignorance yet sleeps beyond the lights of science and religion, and famine peers through the sheaves of plenty. Not always to be so, we trust, however. For, even now it is overshadowed by colossal antagonisms, where the good advances to meet the evil, the right the wrong. Even now it is tinged with streaks of a better day.

But, in order to apprehend the blessing set forth in the text, we must understand that to "inherit the earth" was, among the Jews, a proverbial expression. While they sojourned in the wilderness, the great object of desire — the goal of all their pilgrimage and their effort — was the Land of Canaan, as, after their possession of it, it was to them the most precious heritage. Hence arose this form of speech ; and to inherit the earth, or the land, was a phrase employed to signify "the highest good," "the rarest felicity." It is to be presumed, then,

that the Saviour used this expression as synonymous with the greatest blessing; and that by this common saying, this material symbol, he meant, and was understood to mean, a spiritual inheritance. In essence, all these Beatitudes mean the same thing; and in this place we may interpret Jesus as saying that the meek, like the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the merciful, should participate in the consolations, the glory, the bliss, of his kingdom. "The meek shall inherit the earth;" that is, they shall enjoy the highest good, both in the present blessedness and the future consequences of that religion out of which their spirit and temper flow. Theirs is that broad possession, that rich tract "of wealth unknown," which lies in the depths of every Christian soul; that substantial inheritance, compared with which all outward and material good is but a shade, in which are mines of fadeless treasure and inexhaustible delight, which is unaffected by the alternations of fortune and the changes of time, which is not bounded by death's dark river, and will not van-

ish in any earthly decay,—the inheritance of faith, and love, and holy thought, and divine communion. Theirs, too, is the inheritance of the heavenly land, the realm that lies far above the lusts and the deceits of this mortal estate, which has “no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof,”—this inheritance is theirs, for theirs are already its dispositions and its peace.

But, while such appears to be the primary signification of this Beatitude,—the fulness of its promise,—there are other senses in which, without perverting the meaning of the words, we shall find it true that “the meek inherit the earth.” In the first place, because, more than others, they are fitted to extract and to enjoy the substantial good of their present estate. A patient and humble temper gathers blessings that are marred by the peevish and overlooked by the aspiring. The ambitious man does not remain long enough at rest with any possession to enjoy it. The prize which he so eagerly

plucks is no sooner grasped than it grows tasteless, and is spurned for fresh accessions; while, borne on in his giddy career, the good he had is dashed from him, and he falls into miserable defeat. But, while the tempest of change sweeps over the high places of the earth, and makes desolate the proud, the lowly remain in quiet satisfaction. As they have kept upon the surface of moderate desires, not having been lifted up, they are not thrown down.

Moreover, in a contented disposition there exists a magic power over circumstances, which evokes a hidden beauty from unlikely things, finds marvellous sweetness in a crust of bread, and hangs bare walls with shapes of glory. And not only is such a disposition satisfied with little, but, under the chemistry of right affections, that little becomes indefinitely expansive and fruitful. On the other hand, one may hold a large fortune in such a way that it shall be only a burden and a curse. Beset with a thousand cares, perplexed by constant scheming, agitated by hopes and fears, embroiled in the dust and heat of the

market, he is not so much the possessor of his property as its slave. Mere ownership is *not* possession. Not he who has simply the monetary control of an estate — the buying and selling, or only the material products of it — *possesses* it, but he who extracts its essential good, and into whose being it passes, and becomes a constituent part of himself. The rich man has broad acres set over against this name in title-deeds and records. He fences them in, he builds upon them, he gathers their harvests. But how much of this still remains, an inalienable legacy, to those who possess the discerning eye and the understanding heart ! The permanent blessing that lies under the material form, and that the owner may never enjoy,—the glory of the landscape, the suggestion of the sunshine and the flowers, the spiritual significance that shall compose a part of our essential life, when all mortal estates shall have crumbled away, and human claims shall be forever annulled ! In short, whether we truly enjoy any lot in life depends upon the disposition we carry into it. The

kind of eyes with which we see, the kind of temper with which we act, will make much of little, or little of much; and the meek, whether rich or poor in worldly condition, by their contentment and faith, by their lowly stooping and calm serenity, will, I repeat, extract the substantial good of things, which is disregarded or perverted by the hasty, the fretful, the proud, and the sensual. In this way the universe of God is theirs. In this way they derive the present blessing of life, the benediction that abides in every sorrow as well as in every joy. In this profound and only real sense, they inherit the earth.

But, again; the meek inherit the earth in the *influence* which they send out, in the *work* which they do. "They *shall* inherit the earth," says the text. As though the declaration bore this purport,—that, while it is acknowledged that the humble, the patient, the self-sacrificing, the charitable, do not hold the world in actual possession, in the *future*, in the sure working of time, they will have the dominion—a moral

dominion, the only essential and permanent control. And do not things work to this result? In the course of history, those who have denied themselves for truth and righteousness, those who have shed out their love like balm, those who have stood in their lot and meekly endured, begin to touch the hearts of men and sway their souls. As ages roll on, the mere splendor of achievement fades, and the *nature* of the deed is regarded. The tinsel of the conqueror drops off, and the grossness of his ambition, the blood-spots of violence and the canker of selfishness, appear. Yes, as ages roll on, mankind begin to recognize their real benefactors, and the true heroes. The sweat of productive toil comes to be esteemed more than princely blood; and they who have made grass and corn to grow, than they whose harvests of honor have sprung in the furrows of battle, and been reaped with sickles of death. The world's actual monarchs come up in the soiled garments of labor, with their hands on the printing-press and the plough. They draw near from the fields of exploration,

whence they have plucked the trophies of discovery, and touched the magnetic pulses of human thought. They issue from low lanes of suffering, followed by the blessings of the poor; and they control the affections of the race with the sceptre of a healing mercy. They rise from the red dust of the amphitheatre, they leap from the martyr's fire, and go upward, with their unyielded truth, to shine as stars forever. So speaks the inevitable law of events,—“Fall back, ye glorified Cæsars and Napoleons! ye possessors of a dead renown and of a material good! Give place in honor, in power, in permanent dominion, to the patient, the loving, the faithful, the meek, and let them thus ‘inherit the earth.’ Above all, in the wreck of dynasties, of institutions of old violence and cruel wrong, come Thou who didst not strive nor cry, who didst not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax! Come, pierced and gentle One, stained not with the blood of others, but with thine own, and ascend to universal dominion!”

And I remark, finally, that, in this way, as the world moves on, as Christianity advances, the meek shall literally and actually inherit the earth. This is the tendency of the work of the gospel in the world. In its own calm and noiseless way, it is subduing things unto itself. It is filling laws, institutions, social relations, with its own mild yet energetic spirit. It seems a slow process to us, in our brief space of time and in our haste. But before Him to whom a thousand years are as one day, it is surely and steadily going on; it proceeds as speedily as is consistent with His own great method, and the magnitude of the result. And there are certain landmarks in history by which we ourselves can read this advancement, certain unmistakable contrasts between the present and the past. Moreover, this work of Christian progress goes on in such a manner as to demonstrate the insufficiency of all other powers, compared with this spirit of meekness and endurance. There is no controlling force, there is no permanent dominion in the universe,

but that of love; and every age more and more clearly indicates this truth. The Spirit which is to sink into the hearts of men, and subdue the evil that is there,—the Spirit before which the desert shall blossom as the rose, and the world be transfigured with the glory of the millennial day,—is that which was manifested when God gave his only-begotten Son. The greatest instrument of power and victory ever sent into the world is the cross. And so, as heaven descends and flows into, as Spirit takes possession of the souls of men, it will be literally true that the meek shall inherit the earth. Is this all a dream, a poetic figure? No; we will trust and believe that it is a prophetic reality, and that procession down the mountain is symbolical of the march of humanity, crying out, not to a rejecting, but to a confessing and a receiving world, “Behold, thy *King* cometh unto thee, meek.”

But, hearer, this grace of meekness is not merely for our admiration, but for our adoption. Are we, in our individual lives, heralding that

bright consummation? Or, as we look into our hearts, do we find there the sting of pride, the fire of evil passion, the restlessness of impatience, the lust of sensual possession? I say, again, this is no real possession. In all true, in all essential respects of blessedness and power, the meek, only the meek, inherit the earth.

IV.

THE BLESSING OF THE SEEKERS AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. — MATTHEW 5: 6.

OUR Saviour refers here to the keenest animal sensations, in order to illustrate intense spiritual desire. His language suggests the great truth that, as in every man there are sensual faculties, so is there a moral and superior life, which must be fed and satisfied; and the reference to these appetites enables us to realize more vividly, perhaps, than in any other way, the *earnestness* with which we must seek this highest good. Not as a possession which we may postpone to a remote period, when we have gained some more immediate end; not as an arbitrary

yoke or a dead form; not as a mere ornament of character, or a talisman in the hour of trouble; but as the deepest necessity of our being, as conscious of our incompleteness, and emptiness, and deplorable destitution without it, must we seek for righteousness. Not merely eulogize it, and profess to desire it, and lift up now and then a sluggish prayer for it; but, as the starving beggar craves bread, as the traveller in Arabia's desert pants for the gushing spring, we must *hunger* and *thirst* for it.

Those who do thus hunger and thirst, it is said, are blessed; and this leads me to observe that in the very awakening of this desire there is a benediction. For it implies a moral uplifting, a new perception, an influx of holier life. The great law respecting all men, not only as to the distinction between the present and future state, but as to their personal experience and character in this world, is, "First, that which is *natural*," or sensual. First, the adaptation of our nature to these material conditions, among which we are to live and grow. First, the unfolding

of the husk or shell of our humanity; those powers which are to be the instruments of nobler faculties; this chrysalis from which our spiritual being shall evolve. But it is to be feared that a large majority remain in this preliminary stage; that is, they *continue* merely natural or sensual. Their higher affinities cannot be entirely suppressed. A vague longing, a brooding sense, mingles with their consciousness; but their predominant ideas and their practical energies are wholly of this world. Their conception of good is earthly, and their desires correspond. Tabernacled in their clay there is a spirit whose faculties shall survive all mortal investments. Infinite depths stretch out around them, where their being shall run when the earth has dissolved and passed away; but all their striving is for objects that lie beneath the sun, and that "perish in the using."

For instance, with many the great desire of life springs up in literal hunger and thirst, in the craving of the *appetites*. The morning question and the evening care are, "What shall

we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" Often, it is true, this comes from the sheer pressure of circumstances. The bodily wants grow imperious, not only by indulgence, but by denial, and until their lawful demands are satisfied will hardly allow room for any other claim; and it is sad to think what numbers there are whose condition binds them to this bodily servitude, this struggle for the absolute necessities of life; thousands who are daily fencing with death, buffeted by the extremest poverty, weighed down by an atmosphere of material necessity which shuts out all higher suggestion. We may say that religious faith would help them in this struggle,—would enable them to bear, and would lift them above these bodily ills,—and this is true. But how shall religious faith strike root in this sterile sensuality? How shall it expand in these reeking pits of defilement, these stony arteries of cities, where no ray of heaven can break in to warm, and no holy dew distil to nourish, and where the meanest wants of our nature tug at a man con-

tinually, and hold him down to his animal instincts? Teacher of this faith, missionary of these sublime consolations for the poor, you must carry into these lower tiers of humanity not only the elements of everlasting life, but of the life that now is. Like the great Teacher, who first touched the blind eye and the deaf ear, you must remove the most conscious and immediate need, that you may strike into the vein of yet deeper wants. And ye who make up what is called "society;" comfortable men, respectable men; who shrink from the degraded "masses," and wonder at the blackness and loathsomeness of human depravity as it simmers and belches there; remember your relationship to that humanity,—remember how much in you is the easy fruit of *circumstances*; consider how great has been your vantage-ground in being poised above these blind necessities, and do not merely *say* "Be ye warmed and filled;" but, in their actualities beholding your own possibilities, reach out a helping hand, that they may be lifted from this confused battle of the senses,

that they may look up and see the starry immensities through which they drift, that they may feel the pressure of their higher nature, and hunger and thirst for better things.

But, my friends, if it is sad to think of the multitudes who are thus bound to animal desires, it is still more melancholy to see those who have *voluntarily* given themselves up to these,—who, knowing the better, have chosen the worse, and made themselves the discrowned fools of passion. When we consider what man is, what he may be in his best estate, the faculties which mingle in his nature, and the destiny that opens before him, the contrast between the possible and the real strikes us with ever-fresh wonder. The slave of lust, the pained glutton, the victim of intemperance pitched by the wayside and dripping with debauch, show how easily we surrender the prerogatives of our nature, and for what base ideals too many hunger and thirst.

There are others, however, who, rising above the absolute control of the appetites, still limit their desires by the horizon of this world. Con-

sider the tens of thousands who toil and sweat with scarce a thought of any nobler good than *wealth*. The face of the whole earth is covered with indications that this, to them, is the prime interest of existence. It is this that is declared in the smoke and din of cities, the monuments of labor, the endless caravans and the fleets of commerce. It is this that is declared wherever the glorious enterprise, the high aspirations, of the human soul are absorbed in dreams that haunt the night, in clouds of golden dust that quench the eternal lights of heaven! Men,—daring perils and enduring pains such as martyrs have proved to win their palm,—quit the homes of their childhood, the sanctities of their youth, the dearest communions of affection, and on shores where no Sabbath reigns,—where, in the greed of utter selfishness, man forgets his manhood,—where death hovers in the air, and the eagle screams over neglected graves,—they hold up the shining gold and say, “Behold our highest good!”

In ways like these, or in scheming for fame

and power, men show that they are not awake to the true ends of their being. And, if some notion of it broods in their consciousness, it is but a notion; a dim perception, not a passion, not an ardent, controlling desire, like hunger or thirst.

I repeat, then, it is a great thing when it *does* become a desire, as suggested in the text; and the very aspiration involves a blessing. It implies a spiritual awakening. It shows that thick, blinding scales of material error have dropped from the eyes of the soul, when one really sees and *feels* that the highest good is not sensual gratification; not gold, or pomp, or fame, or intellectual power even, bright and lofty as it is, with its starry scroll and crown.

And it is a great thing, my friends, not merely because it implies such an uplifting and purifying of the soul, but because the desire is one step towards the achievement. If the aspiration for righteousness be as intense as hunger and thirst, *effort* will inevitably follow.

And the promise is, that the desire, combined

with the effort, shall be gratified. They who hunger and thirst, and strenuously endeavor after righteousness,—which means moral goodness, virtue, holiness, acquaintance and communion with God, the knowledge of truth, the performance of duty,—they who seek for this shall be filled. *Filled!*—that is, they shall obtain that for which they seek; they shall be blest with the enjoyment of spiritual good, with the devotion of the highest faculties of their being to the highest ends. They shall be filled with the satisfaction of a harmonious and reconciled nature; with the peace of God, that passeth all understanding.

And this, being in contrast with all other objects of human desire and effort, shows that righteousness, spiritual good, is the only true end of our being. For, certainly, nothing else *does* satisfy us,—~~does~~ completely fill our nature, and give it a central rest amidst all trials and changes. As man is not merely a creature of earth and sense, of course sensual gratification cannot afford him complete rest and

peace. He cannot lie down and wallow in indulgence, as though he were only an animal. Whenever he attempts it, he feels a conscious degradation; he finds a bitterness mingling with the guilty pleasure, and detects the penumbra of a solemn retribution. The strongest argument against the philosophy of materialism is not dialectic. It leaps out from the very depths of human nature. It is in the experience of the vilest and most degraded man, at times waking fitfully to a consciousness of that vileness and degradation. It is in the lusts that perpetually cry "Give, give;" in the hunger that grows into a keener torment; in the thirst that consumes and rages; — all of which, in their unlimited sweep, declare their connection with a deathless nature. A man may drown, for a time, all his faculties in intemperance; he may plunge recklessly into the current of sensual gratification. But it is his peculiarity and his retribution that he cannot remain in this torpor and carelessness. He is uneasy; he is self-conscious. He cannot live by bread alone. He may not

know what ails him, or what he wants; but with the mere ministries of sense he is not filled.

Nor is there any permanent satisfaction in the accumulation of worldly goods. For these goods themselves are uncertain. The stream of fortune is proverbially fickle, and the man who thinks himself safely moored is liable to unexpected shifts, which will make shipwreck of his hopes. As though he felt that, whatever may be his worldly possession, it is good only as the vehicle of some better result,—as though it were worthless unless kept in circulation,—he never is at rest with what he has got. Who that now hears me is ready to say, “I am content with the property I have acquired, and am ready to sit down with it as it is, and calmly enjoy it”? The eagerness with which thousands will embark upon to-morrow’s busy sea will answer this question. Some far-off spot of repose, perhaps, such a man has in his mind’s eye; some limit fixed in the distance, at which he will pause. But now he is tempted to still further ventures, indicating that what he has already gained does

not satisfy him in itself. In all these enterprises, moreover, the shrewd man of business feels his peril; nay, he summons all his shrewdness to meet that peril, as one mishap may not only frustrate his plan, but scatter what he has already gathered. Who has not noticed the turnings of fortune's wheel, and seen the schemer who was at the top to-day to-morrow dashed to the bottom? Who has not seen the man who seemed so stable in his wealth surprised by some unlucky stroke, or tumbled down by one of those tidal revolutions which almost periodically break up the great surface of business operation? In this struggle for wealth, is not the prominent idea that of *risk*? Does not one endeavor to make all sure by note and mortgage, by iron safe and insurance, and yet is conscious that all possibility of loss is not prevented? And can we rest, as our highest good, in that which is so uncertain? Which the bad faith of our fellow-men may destroy; which the wind may level, the sea swallow, or the red flame lick up in an hour; which, by a blast from some

unforeseen quarter of fate, or Providence, may all be swept away? A due estimation of the *uses* of wealth; a brave endeavor to secure ourselves against the pressing necessities of our earthly lot, is of course commendable; but, I ask, can this be our only and our chief satisfaction? Let any man ask himself, Is making money the great end for which I was sent into the world? Did God call me from non-existence, and inspire me with this soul whose thoughts spring into eternity, and endow me with this body like a goodly garment, merely that I might grow rich? Was this universe unrolled in such magnificence, and hung round with splendors, in order that there might be an opportunity for me to get houses and lands,—in order that I might spin my span of being into gold? Does the course which I have pursued for so many years, and in which I have absorbed all my time and my faculties, explain my existence here, my position in the material creation, and the meaning of things about me?

And, surely, there are ills in life against

which worldly good does not shield us; instances, when it cannot penetrate our hearts and give us perfect peace. Money is a friend in one sense; it can procure us much service; but can it buy real friendship? Does it not too often attract the parasite, who loves us not for what we *are*, but for what we *have*? Is it a full supply for bodily weakness, and old age, and bereavement, and the solemn passage of death? Deeper than all, can it cure the smart of the sin-sick spirit and the burdened conscience, and give us healing in our moral disorder? I ask you, O hearer! to reflect whether the property you hold or covet is such a thing that you desire no other support or shield in those trials that will come and must come to us all, cleaving to the very core of our mortality, and blasting all our earthly delight? Can you endure sorrow with it alone, and does its glitter shed sufficient light into the portals of the grave? No; worldly good cannot satisfy us, for we are heirs of a higher state. Nothing that is without the

soul,—no external possession,—can yield the blessing promised in the text.

Nay, it comes not even with intellectual possession. For the truth which the mind perceives does not inevitably descend into the heart and touch the springs of moral action; does not fill the entire circle of our nature. We see how often the highest mental endowments are conjoined with despotic and exuberant lusts. Often are they the allies of a bad ambition, or the oracles of a miserable misanthropy. Often have the brightest gleams of intellectual splendor flashed from the depths of a restless and tortured soul.

And so, my friends, it is plain that, although man but too commonly is blind to the highest good, and aspires after false and unsatisfactory things, that vague consciousness, that element of immortality, which abides in him, will not let him rest content with any material attainment; with anything that does not yield him permanent, intrinsic, spiritual blessedness; that does not harmonize his moral nature, and give him

communion with God. But with righteousness, with this inward life and peace, all his faculties accord,—the true end of his being is reached,—he is *filled*.

It enables him to rightly discern and apply all other good; it remains when all other good fails and vanishes away. He knows, by its help, how to hold earthly possessions, and how to dispense with them. It enables him to seize upon the very substance of being, so that, in the most essential sense, he who obtains righteousness finds “all these things added unto him.”

“They shall be *filled*!” My friends, there is a deep significance in these words, that we shall feel in proportion to our experience of life, and our knowledge of our essential wants; and so let me ask, in closing, do we realize this supreme claim and need? Is moral good a reality to us? Are the faith and enjoyment of religion, and the objects to which religion relates,—are these the greatest of realities to our perception and our desire? Do we believe in *statements* only, or do we believe in *things*? Do we make confes-

sion of the lip, but without surrender of the heart? If righteousness were really an object of desire to us, if we hungered and thirsted after it, we should make effort to attain it; for, in all other respects, this is the test of sincerity. When our animal wants are aroused, we cannot be diverted from their objects. The wealth-seeker's desire is demonstrated by his endeavor. We see the truth of the scholar's aspiration when the midnight lamp gleams upon his pale and eager face. And that which they seek they generally attain. The good they pursue may not be sufficient for their entire nature, may not satisfy all their wants; but, such as it is, seeking they find it. And if we do not find righteousness, it is because we do not seek it; and, if we do not seek it, whatever we may profess, it is because we do not desire it. And what shall kindle that desire within us? What shall awaken in us a longing for moral excellence, as for meat and drink? A profound consciousness of our spiritual needs, a knowledge of our own souls, and of that good which alone can satisfy them.

For, while other attainments may answer some specific demand, may supply some appetite or faculty, by this alone is it promised that our whole being, our immortal and illimitable nature, shall be *filled*.

V.

THE BLESSING OF THE MERCIFUL.

Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.—

MATTHEW 5 : 7.

THE attribute thus designated may seem to require but little exposition. Mercy among the virtues is like the moon among the stars,—not so sparkling and vivid as many, but dispensing a calm radiance that hallows the whole. It is the bow that rests upon the bosom of the cloud when the storm has passed. It is the light that hovers above the judgment-seat.

We speak of those whose names are glorious with the splendor of dominion, and whose word of power has gone abroad in irresistible action ; we speak of conquerors whose tombs are

wreathed with laurel; but, when we tear off the dazzling veil of fame, and weigh the nature of deeds, how does this single quality of mercy outshine their more boastful honors, and hide a thousand faults! How heartfelt is the tribute of admiration we render, when the monarch has wiped a tear from the eye of the suppliant, or when the victor has checked the sword and set the captive free! In the entire circle of his works, the great poet has written nothing more true, and nothing more beautiful, than those familiar lines,— their very *familiarity* proving how readily they answer to our convictions,—

“ The quality of mercy is not strained :

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath : it is twice blessed, —

It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes ;

’Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes

The throned monarch better than his crown, —

It is an attribute to God himself. —

How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none ? ”

This is a virtue, then, to which our nature pays spontaneous homage; and there is none

more universally attractive. The prevailing spirit of the gospel, and distinguishing it from all other forms of religion, it constitutes its most direct and powerful appeal to the human heart.

But, although this quality of mercy is thus generally comprehended, it may be well for us to devote some attention to its real character and its relations.

I observe, then, that mercy is in complete harmony with *justice*, if not identical with that attribute. I speak of this at once, because upon this point there is most likely to arise an error out of one extreme or the other. I say, therefore, that there is no conflict between mercy and absolute right. It is true there may be instances when the human mind will be perplexed, and the human heart distressed, by an apparent discrepancy,—pity drawing one way, and a strong sense of duty urging the other. In such cases, however, there need be no irreparable breach, if the mercy be true mercy, and the justice pure justice. Still, these qualities may become so alloyed in conventional forms, and so confused to

our conceptions, that there will be a seeming conflict. But, essentially, absolutely, they are at one, and become antagonistic only when this or that parts with something of its true character. We may be assured that unmerciful justice is unjust, and unjust mercy unmerciful. They are both attributes of Infinite Righteousness, and both have regard to intrinsic good. Mercy considers not merely temporary and isolated relief, but the general welfare;—so does justice. For instance; in permitting an offender to go free from all rebuke and punishment, we do not exercise genuine mercy. In the first place, we are not merciful to society; for we let loose upon its interests unrestrained and encouraged crime. We are not merciful to the offender; for we leave him to the sweep of his own passions, and the deepening canker of his guilt. The father who never corrects his child, who never interposes any constraint or chastisement, for fear of hurting its feelings, may be a soft-hearted, but he is not a merciful parent. So, in our dealings between man and man, the gush of impulse,

generous and kind as it appears, may carry us, not only beyond justice, but beyond the sphere of true mercy. For, I repeat, mercy is not a blind passion, but the operation of a profound and comprehensive charity. And are there not some whose "mercy" is of the former kind? Theirs is the spontaneity of a spongy sentimentalism, a lukewarm shower of milk-and-water. They obliterate the lines of guilt and sinfulness, and see only the "interesting" side of sin. They substitute their drizzling pathos for the probing faithfulness of true philanthropy. They deplore the gloom and the iron of the dungeon, forgetting that in these may reside the most immediate remedy for the rigidity and darkness of the offender's soul. True mercy, I say again, is considerate and comprehensive. It pays regard to general and essential good. Its compassion is not a weak and morbid ooze, but springs, like a clear stream, from the heart of a firm and intelligent virtue.

On the other hand, what men have too often enthroned as justice is not that everlasting

right, whose foundations, as in the nature of God himself, are rooted in infinite love, but a sentiment whose motive power is retaliation — that prompt return of injury for injury which, regarding, and regarding intensely, only one selfish claim, overlooks others, and, therefore, is unjust. When the king, in the parable, forgave the humble suppliant his debt, there was an exhibition of mercy perfectly consistent with justice ; but, when that debtor went out and seized his fellow-servant by the throat, and, despite his entreaties, insisted upon his paying the hundred pence, that was not justice, though the pittance was justly his due, and, for pushing his claim, the world would be likely to say he was “seeking justice.” But it was *not* justice. There were other claims beside his pecuniary one. There was the claim of his fellow-servant’s need, which he was pressing beyond the limit of possibility. There was the claim of that fair appeal for “patience.” And there was the claim of that mercy, by whose tenure alone he could now stand up in freedom and make his demand. So

we see that true justice has regard not merely to selfish ends and to literal right, but to the good of others, and the great law of love. Unmerciful justice is unjust. And yet, has it not found deep lodgment in the hearts and the codes of men? Has not the sentiment of eternal right been mingled with elements of unhallowed passion? In private life, what is more common than blow for blow, wound for wound, strife for strife, burning for burning, and to call this intense and inconsiderate selfishness "*justice*"? What more common than the enforcement of a right in utter disregard for others, with an eagerness and a grinding hardness far different in its spirit from any absolute or Christian virtue? And, in the social state,—in that fabric of public order which is dear to every good man, and which, if need be, must be maintained by a sinewy force,—is law always identical with justice? Is the true idea of justice represented in that which is called by its name, when its spirit is simply vindictive, or only expresses the power of society, and when, without regard to other

ends, it seals the irrevocable doom,—pours out the unreturning blood? This selfish and revengeful conception, too, hallows the edict of the tyrant, and the claim of the oppressor; consecrates alike the gallows and the bow-string, adopts as its symbols the “rack, the engine, and the wheel;” ay, and may legitimate the act of him who, for one fatal stroke of vengeance, becomes, in his turn, amenable to justice. O, men make a great mistake when they embody red-eyed and gory passion in the colossal forms of order and of law, and call it “justice.” Absolute justice has regard to all good, and respects not only the claims of an isolated right, but those of humanity; and thus does it blend in beautiful harmony with mercy:

And so the quality specified in the text is at once firm and tender, strong and pliable, just and humane; more attractive, it may seem, than other virtues, but in alliance with them all. In itself it is the spirit of pity, endurance, charity,—a disposition better felt than described. It is compassion for men’s *outward ills*. It unseals

the springs of selfishness, and warms our hearts with regard for the poor, the troubled and the sick; and in this form beautiful has been its mission upon the face of the earth,—descending into the homes of destitution; brightening the gloom of dungeons; bending over the couch of disease; following the skirts of battle, like an angel, and, among the torn standards and the broken wheels, stooping to stanch the blood of the wounded, and wet the lips of the dying; in its institutions giving the finest expression of civilization; building asylums for the forlorn and the guilty, opening new avenues of knowledge to the blind, and teaching a pictured language to the dumb; clothing the wastes of human sorrow with sanctuaries of joy and hope, and encircling its marts of sordidness and its haunts of sin with the symbols of a holy charity. And thus it goes abroad, overflowing the barriers of sect, upon the diversified aspects of nationality bringing out the lineaments of our common kind, and transfiguring its true messengers into the image of that embodied mercy which, nineteen hundred years ago,

walked our earth with healing for its sufferings and consolation for its woes.

But this is not the only phase of mercy. It does not consist merely in compassion for the outward ills of others, but in a tender consideration for their inward *dispositions*, their moral need and failings. While, as has been shown, it is in harmony with justice, it does not permit us to push even our right with exclusive selfishness, but to lend regard to the weakness and want of those with whom we deal. So far as may consist with rectitude, it is an extenuating principle. It seeks for the soul of goodness even in things evil. No depth is too low for its beneficence, no gloom too dark to admit the light of its patient hope. It recognizes the common humanity under all the disguises of sin, under its bandages and its scars. It detects the faintest quivering of penitence, or, when all is hard and dead, compassionates the more. That son of infamy is still a man, though his manhood is crushed and disfigured; he is still the offspring of God, not unwatched by Him, not out-

side the circle of His help; why, then, should you and I cast him off and stand aloof? Daughter of shame! representative of discrowned womanhood! as that pure and pitying heaven stretching over thy alien head does mercy regard thee,—with sorrow, yet with trust,—as one in whom the sanctities of thy nature have not all perished; as one for whom, through the blackness and the fire, and through penitent tears, there is yet redemption. In fine, this spirit of mercy is the spirit of charitable consideration; of forgiveness, endurance, and profound compassion for moral ills. It is the quality of a great and strong character; while censoriousness, and vindictiveness, and a false modesty, are generally found in mean and coarse natures. Persons of high virtue are always merciful; those who are the most conscious of power, and whose integrity is too transparent to be suspected. These can afford to pity and forgive; while others, in their cruelty, and harshness, and clamor, really confess their narrowness, their weakness, and their fear.

But, perhaps, I have dwelt too long upon a mere *description* of this virtue. Hastening to practical conclusions, let me say, then, that in every-day life the occasions are many when the exercise of such a disposition is required of us. Not merely in reference to material suffering, but by the extenuating word, the charitable construction, the forbearing and generous deed, it is often in our power to show mercy. In conversation, by checking hasty judgment, and turning back the arrows of scandal. In our influence upon opinion, by stating circumstances and pleading possibilities. In our own daily conduct, by exercising lenity and pity, being ready to overlook and prompt to pardon. The occasions for this virtue, however, are far too numerous for me to specify; and as we are thus called upon continually to cherish its beautiful spirit, let me, finally, direct your attention to the consideration presented in the text,—to the blessing of those who are merciful.

“They shall obtain mercy;”—and I need not tell you how rich and needful this blessing is.

In the first place, I regard the declaration before us as proclaiming the operation of a reciprocal law between man and man,—the principle that like produces like. Thus, in the general course of things, a charitable man will be likely to meet with charity, a kind man with kindness, a vindictive man with a reâction of the same spirit. And so it is that the merciful obtain mercy. They diffuse around them, and affect the hearts of others with something of that disposition which moves in their own. Their kind deeds do not fall upon barren soil. Their extenuating judgments are applied to their own acts. Their generous conduct hides many of their own faults.

And, my friends, no man can say how long he shall be beyond the need of these things. In this world of strange vicissitude, he who to-day gives a loaf to the hungry may himself to-morrow be a starving suppliant. In those elements of change that circulate between the cradle and the grave, the poorest beggar in the street is not an impossible type of what may be your condition. Into what mysterious circumstances are

we suddenly thrust! How rapidly, by accident or disease, are we made dependent for the healing draught or the helping hand! And in these reverses the strongest is often brought into the power of the weakest. Nothing is insignificant. Nothing is far enough below us to be despised by us. The mouse gnaws the meshes of the lion. The germ of the oak needs the least dew and sunshine; and, even in its branching might, see by what a small instrument it is brought low! So the crises of our plans and purposes often hang upon feeble and obscure agencies, and make us suitors for mercy. We live in a beautiful system of inter-dependence, where one part finds its completion in another, where each gives and receives. And no one can be faithless to the great law without injury to himself.

But the sanction in the text is not only founded in law of social reciprocity, so far as outward needs are concerned, but who is there that is not liable to be stricken by the arrows of calumny, and brought low by unjust judgment?

The most innocent may well shudder when he considers the toils in which he is liable to be entangled, the misinterpretation which may be put upon his actions, and the suspicion which may assail his motives. No one is so far above the rest, or so firmly fixed in his reputation, that he may not be hurled from his pedestal, and branded with the most odious charges? And, in the sense of this our common liability, let us exercise a patient, suggestive charity; for, in such an hour, be assured that he who has shown no mercy is doubly defenceless.

But the text not only indicates our dependence for mercy upon our fellow-men, but upon One who, whatever our condition in life, and whatever our freedom from others, holds us ever in his power and in his debt. And is it so, O, unforgiving, harsh, exacting man! is it so, that, with every ray of morning light, with every beating pulse, you are adding to this obligation? is it so, that mercy is the very atmosphere in which you live, and move, and have your being, — and yet you refuse it to those around you?

How can you raise a prayer for pardon, nay, how can you think of that which sustains you in life and enjoyment, and yet persist with your hard front and your bitter spirit?

My friends, what shall we render unto God for his benefits to us? What can we contribute by our outward acts, by all our achievements? Yet he is graciously pleased to accept the intention of our conduct; he measures not our performance, but our disposition. And none is more acceptable to Him than that which is most like His own nature, and for the exercise of which, in the trials and reverses of life, in the contacts of every day, and in all our transactions with our fellow-men, He gives us ample scope. And, surely, imperfect and undeserving as we all are, we who heed these opportunities may come to Him with more confidence, when we remember the promise, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

And now let us ask, how shall we imbibe, and by what means shall we cherish, this spirit of mercy? Not from our own unaided hearts,—

not from the examples and customs of the world. It is hard for *that* to credit the dignity and the potency of mercy,—much more, to practise it. And this suggests to us that which renders Christianity so original and peculiar. In opposition to the impulses of the human heart, in opposition to the conduct of men through every generation, in opposition to laws, and maxims, and institutions, it proclaims the might and the blessedness of mercy. It has gone forth in the world, regenerating it with this new spirit of love, and gradually changing the aspects of its civilization. But not only is this quality of mercy thus prominent in the gospel as a precept, or as a moral force merely. It is an effective precept, it is such a moral force, because it furnishes a living illustration of all-embracing, long-suffering, forgiving, self-sacrificing charity. He who spoke the texts of the sermon on the mount provided the comment in his own life. Whatsoever is attractive, whatsoever thrills us and shall thrill all ages with inexpressible joy and admiration, in the narra-

tives of the good Samaritan, the guilty woman, the weeping penitent, the prodigal son, is concentrated in and streams out from the personality of Jesus. He has displayed the possibilities of love, and converted teaching into history. If we would attain to any real blessedness, if we would acquire a glory before which the splendors of this world grow dim and perish, if we would rise to any actual communion with God, that is the spirit we must cherish and exhibit. And, if we would kindle its soft flame in our hearts, if we would nourish and deepen its power, we must keep near to its brightest and fullest expression, as revealed in the records of the evangelists.

VI.

THE BLESSING OF THE PURE IN HEART.

Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. —

MATTHEW 5 : 8.

AS the heart is the organ of physical, so, in the Bible, it is used to signify the seat of spiritual being,—the spring and centre of our moral personality. In it are contained the pulses of human affection, and the roots of the understanding; and to and fro run the arteries of motive and of the will. Touch a man's heart, and you lay hold of the helm that steers him; you reach a power that lies deeper than appearances, and behind reason. Thence proceed the shapings of circumstance, the interpretations of outward existence, and the interior scenery of the soul;

for, "out of the *heart* are the issues of life." Therein abides the real outline and texture of a man—his essential character; for, as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Christianity, therefore, as the divine agent of life and salvation for man, did not come as a system of *forms* and *ceremonies*. It did not present religion as a charm, or talisman, effecting its results by physical contact, or manipulation. It held but lightly those whose righteousness consisted in cumbrous sanctities,—in length of robe and breadth of phylactery,—because these were *only* forms; because they covered up the springs of spiritual life, and drew away the energies of the soul, suffering the sap of goodness to ooze out and become stiffened in dry stalks and dead leaves. Still, it did not repudiate these as altogether false and worthless. It *fulfilled* their purpose. It cast away the mere husk, but it took up the intrinsic significance, and made a moral application of it. It did not insist upon washing of hands and purification of garments; but, as, according to the ancient ritual, cleanness

of body and of raiment was a condition for entering the temple and the symbolical presence of Jehovah, so our Saviour, illustrating a religion, not of types and shadows, but of the substantial realities corresponding to these, transferred the condition from the outward to the inward, and pronounced spiritual cleanness to be a qualification for apprehending the Deity, and communing with him, in the conditions of the present state, as well as in the great archetypal temple on high. Because the gospel was the system man really needed,—because it penetrated, through all forms, to the actual spring of vitality in human nature,—Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in *heart*.”

And, for this reason, Christianity, on the other hand, is not a *philosophy*. In rising above forms and ceremonies, it does not soar into abstractions. Its prime object was, not to gratify the curiosity of man, but to attract and sanctify his affections; not to exercise his mere reasoning faculties, and multiply the data of his scientific knowledge, but to enrich his soul with

love and faith. It came not to solve problems in metaphysics, but mysteries in life; not to give sharply-defined revelations, but to clarify the interior vision, and heave up the whole spiritual ground-work. In short, I say, it came not as a mere philosophy, to propound and instruct, but as a religion, to regenerate, to brood over the solemn depths and chaotic elements of our nature, until it should emerge in a new creation of harmony and joy, glowing with divine beauty, and pregnant with holiness. And, while it is in harmony with the grandest action of the intellect, while, in order to accomplish its result, it makes use of the intellect, and by that result the intellect itself is quickened and enlarged, the main point of its effort is this moral centre, this lever of the soul, this throne and gateway of the powers of life, thronged with motives, sentinelled by passions, and, too often, polluted by sensuality and sin.

Therefore, I say again, because it is this radical seal of our nature, and because it was to redeem that nature that the gospel was sent,

and because Christianity was not a system of forms, nor a system of logical statements, but a *religion*,—therefore did Christ say, “Blessed are the pure in heart.”

“For they shall see God.” Whatever may be indicated by the consummation of this blessing, whatever interpretation it shall assume among the glories of heaven, its essential result consists in a clearer apprehension, a more intimate communion with the Deity, now and ever,—not only in the future, but in the present state. I would say, therefore, that this Beatitude unfolds naturally, from the very condition of those described in the text. Seeing God is an *innate* quality of purity of heart. In a profound sense, it is true that only the pure in heart *can* see God. The privilege could not be accorded to those who are absorbed in a formal and ceremonial system; for the sensual and outward eye cannot behold Him. They cannot enjoy it who rest upon an abstract philosophy; for He is not perceived by the mere intellect. The blessing pronounced in the text is the blessing inherent

in a moral faith—in inner, spiritual, regenerating religion.

I say, in the first place, that seeing God is not a *physical* act. In embodied likeness, in material shape, no man hath seen or can see Him. He whose attributes are illustrated in the play of stupendous forces and the march of ordered worlds, in the illimitable reach of space, and in every sunny drop, has not revealed His essence. He whose glory burns in all the flashing wheels of night has not laid bare the depths of that glory. He whose presence is everywhere, lifts not the veil that hides that awful presence. We know the access, but not the recess, of His thought; the foreground of His nature, but not the mystery of His being. Yet if, reverently, we may suppose that such a revelation were made, the mere physical organ, the sensual vision, would not recognize Him. Nay, for all human necessity, a sufficient manifestation has been given. The moral image of God has been projected into our world. Nineteen hundred years ago it walked among men; yet how

many recognized it as such? How many apprehend it now? After all, one of his near disciples could exclaim, "Show us the Father;" and, though he has been a long time with us, how few of us truly know him!

True seeing, my friends, is not merely a superficial beholding, the perception of outward forms, the image cast upon the retina. It requires a degree of *knowledge*, of interior apprehension. The physical or sensual eye, therefore, in fact, sees nothing,—it only takes hold of objects. There must be intelligence back of it; there must be sympathy, and love, and faith. One man looks out upon a natural prospect. But to him there is nothing but a mass of land and water. It hangs as a meaningless reflection in the mirror of his eye. But another *sees* the landscape. His enlightened perception and his feeling heart give him vision, and he discovers a thousand instances of beneficence and beauty. He who sails up the noble river of Europe, and has before him only verdant banks and a flowing stream, might as well loiter upon any other

channel of the globe. But he who peoples its shores with crowded recollections, who lights up its castles with legendary glory, and trails its vines around the fragments of the past,—he who pours over its heights the processions of history, led by reënnimated Cæsars and Napoleons,—he *sees* the Rhine. When you see your friend, you do not behold merely his outward form and lineaments. You see all that makes up the quality of a friend. You see, not merely with the naked eye, but by the aid of sympathy, and trust, and tender remembrance. Breaking through the external features, you perceive the inner man, the warm, true heart, which, through long and trying years, has beat in your grasp. Dear memories look upon you from his eyes, and the furrows which time has drawn and the storms which life has bronzed upon his countenance are, to you, curves of grace and tints of beauty. In short, whatever may be the field or the object of perception, “the eye finds only what it brings;” and the more we apprehend anything, the more really do we see it. The

physical eye reflects only the physical form, and cannot, of itself, interpret it,— cannot penetrate to its essence. And, if matter discerns matter, it requires spirit to discern spirit. If, therefore, our vision is sensual and earthy, cognizant only of *forms*, we cannot see God. In proportion as we are animals, our capabilities are but those of the animal, who has the outward universe glassed in his sockets, but does not apprehend its cause and interior life.

By the same rule, seeing God is not an act of mere *intellectual* perception. We cannot apprehend Him by logic. Our finite formulas cannot grasp the Infinite. The intellect can note phenomena, discover laws, and detect sequences. It can read the heavens as a set of sparkling diagrams. It can reduce concrete matter into acids, and alkalies, and imponderable gases. It is competent in the field of science; but that is a field of *definitions*, and enclosed by mathematical limits. It can see whatever stands in forms of demonstration, and can be resolved by the object-glass of the understanding. But the neb-

ulous immensities of spiritual being are beyond its ken ; and, when it would deal with these, it must adjust itself upon the poise of moral conviction, and add the lens of faith. God is not a definable fact. He is incomprehensible ; far, far beyond the sphere of mere science. In our reasoning we may be able to prove an abstract principle, a first cause, a *primum mobile* ; and the intellect may hold *that* as a deduction from certain given premises. But, surely, not thus do we apprehend the Infinite Father, the Holy God. The intellect discerns only the intellectual ; and it is not thus the Deity reveals himself,—it is not in his intellect man may the most resemble Him. Spiritual qualities, that lie at the roots of the brain,—that lie deeper than the intellect, and animate and inform it,—are the discerning powers. The intellect is still but an external eye, reflecting forms, not apprehending substances,—discerning quantities and methods, rather than qualities. It is a mistake to consider it as the prime agent in discovery. It is but an instrument in the control of passion, and

tinged by preconception. If we would have it clear and comprehensive, it must be directed by right affections and pure symathies. The clouds of the heart color the mind, and its scope and penetration are determined by this moral realm.

In saying that we do not apprehend God by the intellect, but by the spiritual affections, I do not mean to affirm that the spiritual affections can act without the intellect, or that the intellect is ever found entirely divorced from faith and moral conviction. Still, there appear to be some who act as if this divorce *did* exist, and who seek to effect it; who repudiate the authority of these spiritual instincts, and would sweep the entire field of mystery clear with the besom of "positive philosophy." As though the universe were as transparent to them as a dome of crystal! As though they could scoop the infinite ocean of reality into their little cups of theory! As though all the currents of God's movement, and the headlands of his purpose, were mapped upon the charts of their science! Besides, we see how men have gone out into nature and life

with the keenest intellectual powers, and detected nothing there but mathematical problems and intellectual exercises. We have seen them regarding nature as though it were a vast catacomb of dead matter, and pictured expressions of unintelligent law, and cunning feats of chance; — taking in pieces its wonderful combinations, analyzing its textures, wandering among its starry drifts and isles of glory without a thought of God, without perception of that awful Being out of which these forms evolve — that beneficent Providence which holds them within its cincture, and feeds them with its inspiration. They have not seen God, because they have looked with the dry light of reason twisted from its moral basis, or resting upon a basis cold and dead. Not so with Newton, who worshipped while he explored, whose grandest sweep of reason was borne on by wings of reverence and faith, and who, in the highest altitudes of his thought, among worlds and systems moving on the circle of eternal order, and confessing the

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silent majesty of law, saw and owned the presence of the Creator.

Moreover, I have insisted that by the mere intellect we cannot see God, in order to enforce the truth that no exclusive sphere bounds the highest privileges of religion. The qualifications for communion and intimacy with Him do not inhere in those gifts which are the endowment, and, too often, the pride of the few, but in the profound depths of that nature which is the inheritance of all. And when we see the proud philosopher denying the reality of religion, and cavilling at its truths, let not our faith be shaken; for his vision, after all, is dim. He only reasons from what he perceives, and perceives only with the head; while thousands, in the revelation of their own experience, *know* that which he repudiates. In the serenity of humble trust, in the transparent depths of sanctified affection, they see God.

Yes, it comes to this point at last,—that God is to be discerned by that portion of our being in which we most closely resemble Him. We

cannot limit Him to any form ; and, therefore, He is not to be apprehended by physical organs. He is intelligence,—but this is not declared as his most essential nature ; and, if it were, as has been well observed by another, “there is, perhaps, no real resemblance between the intellect of man and the mind of God,—between the creative Source of truth and power, and the more observing and receptive mind that slowly traces out some indefinitely small portion of their manifestations, that originates nothing, but only deciphers and painfully spells out a little of what the mighty Author has written in nature. But in all moral and spiritual qualities there is a oneness of kind, even between perfection and imperfection, even between God and man.” * God is spirit, and, therefore, can be discerned by our spiritual nature only. He is moral, and so can be known only by moral affinities. He is love, and is to be apprehended by deep and right affections. Therefore, the pure in heart, and

* Thom on the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

they alone, see Him,—of course, not with any outward, palpable vision, for thus is He apparent to none, but with that true seeing which consists in intimate knowledge and interior apprehension. As he who has something of genius in himself enters into the spirit of genius, and, therefore, most truly sees or apprehends it,—as we see our friend, by intense sympathy, by a similarity or a correspondence of quality on our own part,—so the pure in heart see God.

They see Him *inwardly*,—in the moral ideal, in the unfolding traits of their own souls. The more we become like Him, the more surely do we recognize Him, until, as the heart grows clear and calm, it reflects Him like a mirror. Indeed, that apprehension of the Deity which every man has to some degree, and which is the essential characteristic that distinguishes him from the brute, exists in the quality of his moral nature. In the vilest and the most ignorant there are fragments of divine perception,—gleams of conscience and of awe,—which, when

all outward indications may be unnoticed or covered up, vindicate the existence and preserve the conception of a God. And this same moral nature, refined by discipline and enlightened by the gospel, gives the steady vision and the transcendent blessing declared in the text.

And thus, prepared by interior acquaintance, by educated sympathy, so to speak, the pure in heart recognize God in all outward aspects. They see Him in nature. "The rolling year is full of" Him. Day unto day, and night unto night, show forth his glory, and declare his handiwork. Indeed, in its highest significance, the material universe is not a collection of dry facts and rigid laws, is not the unrolling of a gorgeous epic or artistic masterpiece; but it is a temple filled with His presence, and declaring its final cause to be His manifestation and His praise. They acknowledge God, moreover, in the providences of daily life. Although they may detect no point where special action separates from general law, they recognize the operation of a Divine care, which superintends the

development of epochs and the motions of suns, while, at the same time, it numbers the hairs of our heads. They believe that "the universe is *ruled*." They see God in the march of history. The thought of Him is as a chastening cloud, to qualify the dazzling temptations of prosperity; and in all the night-time of sorrow, and through the dark valley, His presence is a pillar of fire.

Such, then, is the characteristic, such the privilege, of the pure in heart. Whatever may be the fulness of vision or the nearness of communion which awaits them in higher spheres of being, even amidst the veils and shadows of earth they discern the true good and the real significance of things. Here, and hereafter, they shall see God.

And now, my friends, let me ask what meaning and interest has the declaration in the text for us? As we look into our own hearts, what do we behold there? Impure desires, selfish passions, bad motives? Or, do we see God there? Do we find in our affections and our thoughts a reflection of His glory and His

truth? A man cannot ask himself a more pregnant or startling question than this,—What representation, what likeness to God, is there in my moral nature? With what ideal of God would it correspond? And, in the world without, in the order and change of nature, in the various issues of life, in the experiences of our lot, do we *realize* His presence, and truly acknowledge it?

And, if not, why? Is it because, after all, we live in mere *forms*,—satisfied with decent customs, it may be, and hollow respectabilities? Or, grosser still, are we shut up and blinded with sensual influences? Or, on the other hand, do we rest with mere *intellectual* conclusions?—believe in a *theory* of God, instead of God himself? Sense alone, intellect alone, cannot discern him. We must exercise those affections, those religious faculties of our being, which, forever unfolding, will, throughout eternal ages, bring us nearer and nearer to Him. We must cherish that love and that faith which will render this life sacred and blessed. Then,

even here, we shall always stand in His presence. Then, everywhere, within the scope of the sanctified earth and the condescending heavens, we shall see God.

VII.

THE BLESSING OF THE PEACEMAKERS.

Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God,—MATTHEW 5: 9.

ONE of the profoundest facts in the material universe is *harmony*; and nothing bears more striking witness to divine intelligence and control. We recognize it as the prevailing characteristic in all things about us,—in the mutual action of forces, in the supremacy of law, in the correspondence of parts, in the method of the great whole, or, if discrepancies appear, they are reconciled in the unfolding of more general relations; if local defects seem to exist, they melt away in the light of profounder discoveries; while periods of disturbance are seen to be

only the adjustments of a steady plan,—the phases of still deeper order, from the catastrophe that makes an epoch to the thunder-storm that clears the air. It is not merely the poet who receives tidings of

“—central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation ;”

but upon this conviction science erects its instruments, and bases its inductions. And in this beautiful unity and majestic order, I say, we instinctively recognize the action of mind. They are tokens of God.

And, if the *moral* universe seems less complete, more mixed with painful inconsistencies, and torn by antagonisms, still we may believe that the Creator binds all its oscillations in the harmony of a divine plan, and moves on to its fulfilment. In all His *manifestations*, then, both in the moral and the material worlds, in the *forthgoings* of His nature, He “is not the author of confusion, but of peace.”

And the reverent conception which we enter-

tain of His own interior being is that of eternal serenity; the freedom from discord, the inexpressible harmony of Omniscient foresight and boundless power; of illimitable attributes flowing from infinite moral excellence, enabling us somewhat to apprehend the fulness of the apostle's benediction, when he invokes the God of peace, and promises the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Such conceptions of the Deity, my friends, also help us to comprehend the Beatitude now before us, in which it is declared that the peacemakers "shall be called the children of God." It must be so; because, in cherishing the spirit and in doing the work of peace, we perceive they are like God, and their own moral condition intrinsically involves the blessedness of God. Those who possess and act from this disposition inherit a blessing as vast, as deep, as durable, as abides in a profound similarity to God; and surely no external reward, no human measure of felicity, can for a moment be compared to the good which inheres in this!

But let us now proceed to consider the *terms* of this blessedness,—the *characteristics* of him who in the text is called the peacemaker. Who and what is he ?

In the first place, I observe, he is *peaceable*. That is, he, in his own conduct, maintains harmony and order. He is not turbulent or contentious; but patient, forbearing, disposed to palliate, and even to suffer. Now, there are some people who appear to be always at strife; who, wherever they may be, are never quietly adjusted. They are the knots, the ravelled threads, the dislocated joints, in community. They are quickly aggrieved, and handle a grievance in the sharpest manner. They carry a whole canister of wrath in a very combustible wrappage. Their spirits are thermometers of the most sensitive kind,—a warm breath will set the mercury boiling. They detect an insult in an emphasis, and an impeachment in a look. They are offended by your evident solicitude to avoid giving offence. They attribute their incessant discords to their circumstances, or their associates;

but it is very singular that these should always be awry,—that any kind of harness should chafe them,—that they should touch some irreconcilable point in every relation, and find gravel wherever they stand. The truth is, the fault is in themselves. They have a genius for quarrelling, and a spring of mischief in their own uncontrolled temper, in their morbid pride, and protuberant vanity, and imperious self-will. In the collisions of the world we must yield as well as assert,—must recognize rights limiting our own, and individualities in others as well as ourselves. And the texture of true manliness possesses an elasticity which will bear some pressure and friction; and for the saltiness of life sprinkled upon us by occasional neglect, or abuse, it finds remedy in an interior spring of self-assertion and consolation. For, surely, this peevish sensitiveness to the sayings and doings of others indicates real poverty of soul, or miserable timidity; or else a spirit which is mastered by the body, and lies at the mercy of diseased and jangling nerves. At any rate, the truly

peaceable man, in exhibiting characteristics exactly opposite to those which I have just delineated, is not actuated by a cowardly or truckling disposition; but rather by the manner in which he meets occasions of offence, and adjusts himself to others, and allays the flame of passion in them and in himself, does he manifest personal dignity and power, and a well-balanced, courageous and comprehensive spirit.

The peaceableness of the character commended in the text is not the quietude of a tame meanness, or the wretched compromise of fear. Our Saviour, while virtually rebuking the violent spirit of his countrymen, was commending this virtue of peaceableness to men who would be called upon to assert the highest loyalty of individual conviction, to make the most severe sacrifices, to encounter scorn, peril and death. So it is plain that this disposition, whatever it may be, does not imply moral cowardice, and consists with the vindication of conscience and the maintenance of absolute right. I cannot dwell upon the interesting and timely topics opened by the

suggestion of the consistency between this spirit of Christian peaceableness and the assertion of personal principle and eternal justice. I will say, however, that each virtue is limited, or, rather interpreted by others, and can be rightly defined only in its harmonious relations to the *whole* of a true character. Therefore, peaceableness, maintained at the expense of real and positive right, is wrong,—it ceases to be a virtue. On the other hand, when rights are pushed at the expense of duties, when the abstract is torn from all its relations to the concrete, when individual instances eclipse the general good, when conscience is confounded with passion and moral agitation with physical violence, here, too, is a wrong. There are interests by the sacrifice of which peace is too dearly purchased. One should never be at peace to the shame of his own soul, to the violation of his integrity, or of his allegiance to God. And if sometimes, especially in his public relations, there seems to be a fanatical assertion of this truth, let me say that it is equally fanatical

to deny it, or to mock at it. The profoundest fact that a man stands upon, and out of which he is developed, that which constitutes the very sap and fibre of his manliness, is his *moral sense*. This alone, when upright and pure, makes him a compact stability in society, as well as in his private relations. Public order, the law, the constitution,—select what synonyme you please,—if it has any authority, can assert it, not as *overriding* conscience, but as *binding upon* conscience, not merely as a legislative enactment, but as a *moral duty*. He who adheres to it by anything less tenacious than a *conscientious* grasp is substantially a more unsafe person than your red republican, or fifth-monarchy man. In the latter case, the element of all true loyalty may manifest itself with undue effervescence; but in the former, it is formal and hollow.

In asserting the claims of the state, then, against the protests of the individual conscience, it is absurd to strike away the ground on which rests the stability of the state itself,—the ground of private moral principle; it is absurd to

make the state unseat the very power to which it appeals. The best men in community are the men who feel that the final ligature in our nature is that which binds us to God,—who will suffer all other ties to be cut, before that; and, if such an extreme case does arise, will rather sever the bond of obedient citizenship, like Peter and John, when the council bade them cease preaching the gospel. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God,” said they, “judge ye. For we *cannot* but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” “Here stand I,” said Luther before the Diet; “I *cannot* otherwise; God help me!” We should be careful how we stigmatize such expressions of conscience as these by the name of fanaticism; nor can we deny that extreme conditions may occur when it must assert its supremacy, whatever may be the rupture; and that the spirit of peaceableness commended in the text does not prohibit this. But we must remember that such cases of collision between divine and human authority in

public matters are much rarer than they may appear to be to those who tease themselves and others with exaggerated suppositions, instead of considering the simple fact,—who spend their strength in declarations as to what *might* be, rather than in calmly doing the present duty. I would say, therefore, that he who nourishes the spirit of Christian peaceableness is a good citizen; he has a genuine love of order, and a proper tone of loyalty; and he shows the difference between himself and the mere anarchist, or factious demagogue, or reckless fanatic, when any collision seems to occur between the custom of quiet deference and his allegiance to absolute right, by a solicitous and devout consideration of the matter; by scrupulously examining whether he has not exaggerated the issue; by discriminating between self-willed and hasty impulse, and firm conviction,—between a vain or daring or malignant disposition, a personal vindictiveness, and the general grounds of rectitude,—by respecting his duties as well as his rights, and especially by separating moral agita-

tion from physical violence, and a personal refusal to do wrong from a public incitement to rebellion and force.

In public and in private relations, then, we see the general disposition of the man who cherishes the spirit of Christian peaceableness. That spirit is not one of guilty indifference, or moral disloyalty; it does not forbid truthful, earnest speech, and free moral agitation, without which we should lose one of the grandest elements of public and private existence; but it prohibits a crowding selfishness, an over-sensitive individuality, and the whole tribe of irritable and imperious passions; and inspires a man with the sentiment of obedience, and conciliation, and patience, and self-sacrifice. And such is the method of him to whom pertains the Beatitude announced in the text, so far as his own conduct alone is concerned.

But I remark, in the second place, that he is not only peaceable in himself,—he is a *promoter of peace*. This characteristic seems more especially set forth by the term in the text as it

is translated, "Peacemaker;" and if we interpret the original by the only analogous word found in the New Testament, it certainly bears this sense. He, then, who is a subject of the blessing, has not merely a negative or passive, but an active spirit of peace. He labors to make others peaceable; and, in the first place, in *private* relations, between man and man. And how much this kind of agency may accomplish, we can judge by considering the effects produced by a contrary disposition,—how easily and how widely the seeds of discord are sown abroad by a mischievous or malignant temper, and a tattling tongue. For there are those who seem to feed upon the quarrels of individuals and the discords of neighborhoods,—who take a cruel pleasure in retailing criticisms, insinuating suspicions, dislocating confidence, and fanning the embers of dissension. There is no more dangerous, as there is no more despicable, class of persons, than those messengers of feud and falsehood, those animated spinning-wheels of slander, whose eyes and lips are perpetually busy with mischief;

who spend their days in construing hints and interpreting ambiguous speeches, and in carrying fuel for strife. They do not always go deliberately about the business; not always, perhaps, from sheer purpose of creating discord; but this is the actual result of their interference. They either kindle the blaze, or keep it burning. Their words are inflammable. They carry coals of fire in the very skirts of their garments. And when we consider how easily such dissensions are excited, how words and actions may be misinterpreted, how encomiums of the dearest friend, by a false emphasis, or by being torn from their connection, may be sharpened into rankling arrows, we do not wonder at the success of the strife-makers.

On the other hand, then, how blessed are the labors of the peacemaker; and what an opportunity lies open to us in the performance of his work,—the work of him who, without impertinent intrusion, goes about to heal these social wounds, to knit again these dissevered ties, to suggest some reasonable excuse, to point out some pal-

liating circumstance, and help man look upon his brother man through the sunshine of a considerate and forgiving charity !

And when we consider the evils of these discords and aberrations,—how they have separated chief friends, and created the bitterest enmities ; when we consider all their work in inward passion and external violence ; when we think how they have darkened whole lives, and quenched the fires on cheerful hearth-stones, and turned love to hatred, and kindness to gall, and broken hearts too tender to bear up under their mask of pride ;—and when we think how one mediating word or action might have snatched the dying into life, or buried hateful memories forever in the grave ; when we reflect how much of guilt and misery prevailing at this hour is rooted in human dissension,—are we not ready to exclaim, “Blessed are the peacemakers !”

But the subject of this Beatitude does not confine his efforts for peace to the field of his personal control or observation. So far as his influence will go, he labors to promote it in the

world at large. He is the active and consistent opponent of *War*, that armed quarrel between nations, as much more horrible than strife between individuals, as the action is wider and more deadly. He puts forth what strength he can to arrest that form of desolation which, for so many thousand years, has gone forth in the earth like death on the pale horse, trampling upon all the sanctities of humanity, and letting loose its foulest passions. He does what he can to strip the mask from its false glory,—to show how the victor's laurels grow in blood, and national greatness is built on human bones. There are cases, to be sure, when war does not wear its usual aspect,—when it appears as the last desperate resort of liberty, and when the philanthropist may well ask whether it is not a necessary working of that law which says, "*First pure, then peaceable.*" But, whatever qualification may be admitted, the peacemaker knows that the spirit of Christianity, the tendency of its true operation in the world, is against this embattled strife which involves ele-

ments that run athwart its purpose. The gospel has but a forced alliance with war. Its doctrine of human brotherhood would ring strangely between the opposed ranks. The bel-
lowing speech of cannon, and the baptism of blood, mock its liturgies and sacraments. Its gentle Beatitudes would hardly serve as mottoes for defiant banners, nor its list of graces as names for ships-of-the-line.

And an end to war is not a hopeless, or even a distant result. National sins are sooner removed than individual guilt, and the public sense is in advance of private practice. The completion of that result rests with those who have the Bible and the agents of civilization in one hand, and the implements of war in the other.

And among the nations of the earth there is a growing disposition for amity,—a disposition quickened by the close communication and the mingling interests of the time. What signs and symbols of harmony are these crystal palaces of our day! They stand not merely to enshrine the industry of the nineteenth century, and to

illustrate the skill of different races. The nations meet there as beneath the broad dome of universal peace. Flags that have tossed defiance to each other on the crests of battle dally together in the summer breeze. Ships that once belched destruction from their ports have lowered over their grim sides the symbols of constructive art, and the golden links of universal labor, declaring that the end of human endeavor is not to mar, but to create. Let the *past* bring its glories of desolation, its history of blood. In these achievements of the *present*, these forms of crystal, we behold the clear reflection of the *future*, when all over the broad earth men shall dwell together, surrounded by symbols of brotherhood, and of indissoluble unity. Then shall

“The war-drum throb no longer, and the battle-flag be
furled

In the parliament of man, the federation of the world.”

And, without indicating other signs of this consummation, the peacemaker draws courage for his work from the progress of the gospel.

Christianity is authenticated not only by its fulfilled but by its *unfulfilled* mission,—in its grandeur, its scope, its universality,—and he trusts that, in the operation of its spirit, the time will come when earth's glory shall not rest upon charnels of slaughter, nor its harvests grow luxuriant from fields of the slain; when “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” In this hope, then, as well as in the spirit of his labor, blessed is the peacemaker!

I remark, finally and briefly, that he to whom this Beatitude applies is not only peaceable and a promoter of peace, but is *peaceful*. There is harmony and rest in his soul; a peace which is perfectly consistent with the highest activity, and with strenuous effort. There is the peace of indifference, which prevails in the unconsciousness or suppression of a portion of our nature. There is the peace of indulgence and sluggish ease. But there is a wide difference between

such states of mind and the intense joy, the profound serenity, the freedom from unrestrained appetites and warring passions, which flow from the essential spirit of the peacemaker. The peace, not of innocence, but of effort and of virtue,—that conscious harmony with the Deity, and with all good, which passeth all understanding.

My friends, is ours the blessing of the peacemaker? Not if we are the slaves of evil passion; not if we are vexed by discontent, or troubled by a violated conscience. For an inward harmony, which produces all outward fruits of sweetness and of noble endeavor, is the profound characteristic and beatitude of those who are truly the children of God.

VIII.

THE BLESSING OF THE PERSECUTED. ✠

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. — MATTHEW 5 : 10.

IN the two succeeding verses, Jesus more directly addresses his disciples, and applies the general truth set forth in this. “Blessed are *ye*,” adds he, “when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven ; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” I have selected the text, therefore, as embodying the spirit of the whole passage of which it forms a part, and with which these Beatitudes close.

And, it may be observed, in the outset, that the words before us illustrate the *preceding* declaration; or, at least, indicate its limits. They show what qualifications consist with the principle, and how far one may maintain the habit of peace. We are not to be reconciled with iniquity, we are not to compromise righteousness; and if thus, in the steadfast practice and the bold proclamation of the truth, it proves a *sword*, so must it be,—for this condition also there is a blessing. There are occasions when men must be shaken out of the sockets of conventional quietude and social ease, and the benediction of the peacemaker be gained in the benediction of the persecuted.

Certainly this was the experience of a great number of the early disciples, who were called not only to cherish Christ's spirit, but to endure his cross. Before those who professed or remained true to his name there opened a red and fearful path, bordered by Gentile ignorance and Jewish hatred; a path in which lay the sprinkled robes of Stephen, and the career of

the persecuting and persecuted Paul; which Nero illuminated with ghastly torch-light, and his successors strewed with flame and blood. The number of those who suffered death in those early ages may have been exaggerated; but doubtless many plucked the martyr's crown, while the name of Christian was the signal for scorn and violence. And many, we may believe, as they bowed to the sword, or met the jaws of the wild beast, recollected their Saviour's words, and were able to "rejoice, and be exceeding glad," thus to be enrolled in the same bloody testimony with "the prophets which were before them" and the Master whose cause they served. They proved the truth of this Beatitude at the stake, and snatched the promised bliss from wreaths of fire.

But I need not enlarge upon the great fact of *persecution* for opinion's sake and for righteousness' sake. It stands out too prominently on the field of history to require this. Not always involved directly with religion, it has attended almost every new truth or fresh moral

effort. The reformer has had to undergo, in forms more or less intense, the experience of the martyr; and the foundations of many a cause now strong and flourishing were laid in tears and blood.

It may be more interesting to ask ourselves why this should be so, and what is the spring and spirit of persecution. Why does truth meet with such opposition; why are men so blind to their best good; and why do they so often maltreat their truest benefactors? It may be difficult to analyze these phenomena,—to answer these questions in every particular; but I would say, generally, that a fruitful source of persecution exists in the complexity and perversity of human nature. If man were all intellect, or truth simply an object of intellectual perception, it would encounter no more difficulty than that which attends a mathematical proposition. If the heart was pure, we should recognize the genuine tokens of moral excellence, and render spontaneous homage. But the mind's eye is colored, and the moral

sense is blunted, by innumerable passions: by subtle deceits of interest; by the stubbornness of pride; by falsities of prejudice; by the predominance of a sensual nature, and the disease of a biased will. Probably, in no instance has man acted against goodness and truth, as such,—that is, in direct and conscious opposition; but, often, from the promptings of selfish instinct, or the recklessness of his lower nature, without asking the moral quality of that which he opposed. It is likely that no great truth ever breaks into the world without disturbing somebody's temporal ease, or gain,—at least, no moral truth ever does. But, too generally, this ease or gain is the standard of human motive. Men, not occupying the high stand-point of reason and conscience,—never ascending into this region, but looking merely through the medium of interest, or appetite,—of course rally all their force to resist any innovation that touches their comforts or their profits. For instance, how many are there engaged in the traffic in ardent spirits, who have never thought

of the moral bearings of the question,—upon whose minds the idea of applying the test of absolute right has hardly dawned! They see nothing of the temperance reformation, therefore, as a doctrine of positive rectitude, or as a claim of universal humanity taking precedence of any merely selfish interest; but as a movement which affects their gains; and, therefore, they are far more likely to mob the advocate of total abstinence than to demolish their liquor-casks, or empty their decanters. This explains the conduct of Demetrius. He did not test the labors of Paul by the standard of reason and absolute right; but the element aroused in his bosom by the apostle's teachings was an alarmed self-interest;—this absorbed everything else. He did not stop to weigh those words as appeals of truth; he did not ask whether that heroic earnestness was not the offspring of living conviction, the expression of a soul that had seen and been stirred up by eternal realities; he only knew that they injured his craft,—that those doctrines of Christ and the resurrection lessened

the demand for silver shrines. And here — for human nature is the same in all ages — is one element of persecution,— a selfish and sensual standard of thought and action, which sees not the moral excellence of a cause, or cares not for its absolute truth, but, feeling its pressure upon worldly interests, wars against it. So men oppose the march of righteousness with a barricade of money-bags; so they set up the market value of iniquity against the eternal registry of God; so they cover some popular wrong with the insignia of national glory, and arouse in its behalf all the energy of patriotism and public spirit; so, with the instinct of an interested caste, they endow vested rights and false institutions with borrowed sanctities, and make the truth which threatens these to be an impious heresy or a pernicious lie.

But there are other elements in persecution,— which, perhaps, in order to make a *wide-spread* persecution, must be combined, and foment together. There is ignorance “darkening counsel by words without knowledge;” that huge tract

of chaotic energy, so terribly dangerous to every true interest of man and the state,—that vast, void field, ready to be peopled by any shape, to be heaved by any sentiment, which a cunning influence may engender. There is prejudice or preconception obstinately putting its own interpretation upon persons and principles; seeing these not as they are, but as it *thinks* they are,—so that faith appears as infidelity, and the Redeemer is regarded as a malefactor. There is pride of opinion, unconsciously limiting the sphere of reality, and resisting the power which would strip off its arrogant conceit, and expose its mistakes. These, which may admit of a much finer analysis, and resolve themselves into more subtile principles,—these, more or less implicated, more or less consciously working,—will probably be detected as elements in any act of persecution.

And, influenced by some of these elements, we know that men have wielded the rod of persecution conscientiously, from what they deemed motives of religion and the public good. This

has sometimes been the case with the best of men; nay, the act of persecution was an evidence of their moral sensitiveness. Paul exercised the same conscientiousness in using the sword that he did in bearing the cross. He "verily thought he did God service;" and this will explain the fact that the Christians suffered under the administration of men like Trajan, and Pliny, and Marcus Aurelius, while under the brutal Commodus or Heliogabalus they enjoyed comparative repose.

But to whatever springs we may trace the act of persecution,—whether it be the offspring of a base self-interest or a devout superstition, whether it manifest itself as the insane fury of a mob, or as the vindictive energy or deluded judgment of the church or the state,—certainly, it is one of the most humiliating phenomena in human history and in human nature. It rebukes the pride of reason, and exposes the evil of the heart. It shows, on the one hand, the insufficiency of philosophy, the foolishness of learning, the weakness of even the best men;

and, on the other, it exhibits the melancholy group of passions and sins that darken the mental vision, shut out the influences of holiness and truth, and control the will. And we are thus humbled especially when we trace the history of *Christianity*, and see how that religion, which in all its tenor breathes the very opposite of persecution, has been made the warrant of most horrible cruelty; when we hear the denunciations that have issued from the lips of those who represented the band of poor fishermen and despised peasants, and have beheld in one hand the fagot and the scourge, and in the other the meek image of the Crucified. And are we not constrained to say, with the poet,

“How ill are his high teachings understood !

* * * * *

Where he hath spoken Peace, his name hath been

The loudest war-cry of contending men.

Priests, pale with vigils, in his name have blest

The unsheathed sword, and laid the spear in rest,

Wet the war-banner with their sacred wine,

And crossed its blazon with the holy sign ;

Yea, in his name who bade the erring live,

And daily taught his lesson — to forgive ! —

Twisted the cord and edged the murderous steel ;
 And, with his words of mercy on their lips,
 Hung gloating o'er the pincers' burning grips,
 And the grim horror of the straining wheel.

* * * * *

The blood which mingled with the desert sand,
 And beaded with its red and ghastly dew
 The vines and olives of the Holy Land ;
 The shrieking curses of the hunted Jew ;
 The white-sown bones of heretics, where'er
 They sank beneath the crusade's holy spear ;
 God's dark dungeons, — Malta's sea-washed cell,
 Where with the hymns the ghostly fathers sung
 Mingled the groans by subtle torture wrung,
 Heaven's anthem blending with the shriek of hell !
 The midnight of Bartholomew, — the stake
 Of Smithfield, and that thrice-accursed flame
 Which Calvin kindled by Geneva's lake ;
 New England's scaffold, and the priestly sneer
 Which mocked its victims in that hour of fear,
 When guilt itself a human tear might claim ; —
 Bear witness, O thou wronged and merciful One !
 That earth's most hateful crimes have in thy name
 been done ! ” *

And, with all the rest, there has mingled one
 master-mistake,—the notion that there is any

* Whittier.

real force in persecution,—that it can quench and crush what it will. Why, it cannot destroy an error; it pours oil upon the flame of the grossest heresy, the most absurd conceit. Much less can it obliterate truth from the earth, or stop its stupendous march. The smoke of kindled fagots cannot put out the stars. The devices of human passion, which are often the instruments of conscious weakness, cannot confute the realities of God.

My friends, the lesson is for *us*. For though advancing ages have wrought a great change as to the *forms* of persecution, too much of its spirit abides and operates still. Its working may be read not only in dark and stately scenes of history, but in common instances. It needs not the Roman amphitheatre, or the stake of Smithfield; it needs not the fire or the sword. But it acts, in public or in private life, whenever the force of passion overwhelms the appeal of reason, and stops not to consult conscience; wherever mere brute force interferes with moral agitation; where base self-interest breaks out

against higher claims; where prejudice distorts men and things with its own conceptions, and then condemns the follies and the faults it thinks it sees; where an arrogant orthodoxy sits in judgment upon its neighbor, and, as though it held the keys of earth and heaven, pronounces his faith to be infidelity and his conviction contumacy, clothes itself with pompous denunciation or affected contempt, and sets in motion all the elements of theological bitterness and religious slander. The rack is broken, the stake is plucked up, but *persecution* exists. Its weapons are vituperation and ridicule; excommunication and mob-law; the tongue, the pen, the press, and innumerable methods which can inflict worse than physical hurt, pierce deeper than the body, and leave traces darker than the print of the scaffold or the blasting of fire.

My friends, in our public relations, in our private action, let us see to it that this spirit of persecution is not ours. Let us not confound prejudice and selfishness with the dictates of enlightened conscience and a lawful opposition

to wrong. Let us not confound brute force and clamorous assertion with moral effort and rational assault.

But, if the spirit of persecution exists,—though in different forms from those of ancient time,—so does the *spirit of martyrdom*, for which the blessing is pronounced in the text; and its exercise is still called for. For, what is the *essence* of that temper which, in other days, men carried into the dungeon and the flame? In the first place, it consists in the estimation of principle above all personal considerations and temporal interests; so that ease, and life, and worldly possession, are held secondary to truth and duty. Those who, in the early ages of the church, passed through the baptism of persecution, and were salted with fire, need only have spoken one little word, or given one sign, and their prison-doors would have been unbarred, and existence, liberty, family, friends, perhaps fortune and honor, would have been theirs. What charm made them choose, instead, the bloody circles of the arena, and the devouring

flame? It was the preciousness of principle, the soul's loyalty to the highest realities. When the young mother, Perpetua, was urged by her aged father to recant, she pointed to a vessel that lay on the ground, and said, "Can I call this vessel anything else than what it is? No. Neither can I say to you anything else than that I am a Christian." To the spirits that animated such bosoms, and made such tender hearts firmer than tempered steel, there was no higher claim than the everlasting right. It could not be plucked from them by violence; it could not be bought even by affection.

But let me observe, here, that the true spirit of martyrdom forbids that selfishness which sometimes *seeks* martyrdom. For there appears to be a class of men who prize persecution as a means of notoriety; who court it; who in the missiles of denunciation hear the sound of their own plaudits; and who would feed their vanity with the flames of their own bodies,—at least, in effigy. They never seem so happy as when tossing about in the midst of an uproar which

they have teased and lashed into existence; and they find no readier passport to fame than the reputation of suffering for conscience' sake. For, whatever may have been the sentiment in other times, there is no doubt that public feeling now is apt to side with the persecuted; and our *modern* martyr is full as likely to be smothered with roses as with coals. Or, if he really encounters some harder experience, he may well ask whether it is not the reaction of his own ostentatious bravadoes and ugly temper. The text contains a most important qualification,—“Blessed are they which are persecuted for *righteousness*' sake,”—not for their own sake, not for the sake of their coarse abuse and blasphemous ribaldry, and their strenuous endeavors to *be* persecuted. Not that the persecution of any is to be justified; but all kinds of martyrdom are not to be honored,—especially amateur martyrdom. Christ never *sought* persecution,—he avoided it; and we may believe that his true followers, who suffered for his cause, and acted in the spirit commended in the text, did

not run to proclaim their contempt and defiance, but were found and taken calmly at their posts, and died not with thoughts intent upon the spectacle and the uproar they made, but upon that righteousness for which they were willing to *live*, as well as to perish. So, my friends, if in any way we suffer persecution, it will be well for us to search our motives, and inquire: "Is it for *conscience*' sake?"

But this adherence to principle above all selfish considerations, which forms one great element of the martyr-spirit, presupposes another. Faith *in* principle,—faith in unseen realities, transcending the forms, the interests, the material and perishable good, of this world. The sufferers under persecution *believed* in the existence of that kingdom whose bliss they inherited. O, what intense convictions to them were God, Heaven and Christ! Within those scourged and scathed bodies what eternal facts had entered and become the life of the soul! How unsubstantial seemed that which other men called good, compared with this joy of experience,—how foolish

to barter this inward peace for outward approval, — the permanent for the transient! “Swear, curse Christ,” said the proconsul to Polycarp, “and I release thee.” “Six and eighty years have I served him,” replied the venerable disciple, “and he has done me nothing but good; and how could I curse him, my Lord and Saviour!” And theirs was a vision that pierced the barriers of the grave, and saw far beyond the principalities and powers of the earth. Above the martyr’s fire hovered a glory beneath which the splendors of this world grew dim, and his dripping garments turned to coronation robes. The dreadful amphitheatre swam away from before his sight, the ranged spectators faded, the pinnacles of the celestial city gleamed upon him; and he saw the angels casting down their crowns, he saw martyred Stephen with his beatific face, and the long line of prophets, who before him had gone up from the ordeal of blood; and amidst the taunts and the accusations, and before the open jaws of death, he was able to “rejoice,” yea, to “be *exceeding* glad.”

And, my friends, if, as I have shown, the spirit of persecution may prevail at the present day, so is there need of the martyr spirit. Those who would live truly in the present world and the present age must cherish the same adherence to principle, the same faith in eternal verities, with those heroic sufferers of the olden time. And still there are trials of this faith. True men now are apt to be persecuted, though not ostentatiously seeking it. It may not be an invariable test, but certainly there is a ground of doubt as to the *faithfulness* of that man whose way in the world is always smooth and easy. At least, let any one endeavor, every day, amidst the transactions of business, politics, social intercourse, to live out the best convictions of his heart,—let him be actually a *confessor* as well as a *professor*,—and see if he will suffer no persecution. See if he is not called hard names, and charged with hard things, and if he does not find flint and thorns springing up in his way.

But, my friends, however we may fare in this respect, let the essential spring of the mar-

tyr-spirit be cherished by us all. Let us apprehend the *reality* of spiritual facts, and that righteousness is worth more than everything else. Then, if "clear skies and seasons calm" are ours, manliness will also be ours, and Christianity, and peace with conscience; and if persecution falls to our lot, we shall still foretaste the eternity and excellence of the Heavenly Kingdom. We shall discern Truth behind every shadow, emerging, moving onward through the firmamental sweep of the ages, and the inaccessible heights of God. And remember, ye who really suffer for the right and the good, "So persecuted they the Prophets who were before you."

Such, my friends, are some of the suggestions afforded us by that list of Beatitudes, with the last of which we now pause. They illustrate a circle of graces which are not mere ornaments of character, but deep influences of spiritual bliss and power, which pertain to the inmost structure of our being. A coronet of virtues, indeed, they

are ; but they are significant of intrinsic majesty, and their brilliance streams out from the soul. God grant that, as expressive of this inward excellence, they may adorn our lives ; for then shall we be among the blessed !





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